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Eminent Women Series

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EMILY BRONTË

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EMILY BRONTË

BY

A. MARY F. ROBINSON

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EMILY BRONTË.

INTRODUCTION.

THERE are, perhaps, few tests of excellence so sure as the popular verdict on a work of art a hundred years after its accomplishment. So much time must be allowed for the swing and rebound of taste, for the despoiling of tawdry splendours and to permit the work of art itself to form a public capable of appreciating it. Such marvellous fragments reach us of Elizabethan praises; and we cannot help recalling the number of copies of 'Prometheus Unbound' sold in the lifetime of the poet. We know too well "what porridge had John Keats," and remember with misgiving the turtle to which we treated Hobbs and Nobbs at dinner, and how complacently we watched them put on their laurels afterwards.

Let us, then, by all means distrust our own and the public estimation of all heroes dead within a hundred years. Let us, in laying claim to an infallible verdict, remember how oddly our decisions sound at the other side of Time's whispering gallery. Shall we therefore pronounce only on Chaucer and Shakespeare, on Gower and our learned Ben? Alas! we are too sure of their relative merits; we stake our reputations with no qualms, no battle-ardours. These we reserve to them for whom

the future is not yet secure, for whom a timely word may still be spoken, for whom we yet may feel that lancing out of enthusiasm only possible when the cast of fate is still unknown, and, as we fight, we fancy that the glory of our hero is in our hands.

But very gradually the victory is gained. A taste is unconsciously formed for the qualities necessary to the next development of art—qualities which Blake in his garret, Millet without the sou, set down in immortal work. At last, when the time is ripe, some connoisseur sees the picture, blows the dust from the book, and straightway blazons his discovery. Mr. Swinburne, so to speak, blew the dust from 'Wuthering Heights'; and now it keeps its proper rank in the shelf where Coleridge and Webster, Hofmann and Leopardi have their place. Until then, a few brave lines of welcome from Sydney Dobell, one fine verse of Mr. Arnold's, one notice from Mr. Reid, was all the praise that had been given to the book by those in authority. Here and there a mill-girl in the West Riding factories read and re-read the tattered copy from the lending library; here and there some eager, unsatisfied, passionate child came upon the book and loved it, in spite of chiding, finding in it an imagination that satisfied, and a storm that cleared the air; or some strong-fibred heart felt without a shudder the justice of that stern vision of inevitable, inherited ruin following the chance-found child of foreign sailor and seaport mother. But these readers were not many; even yet the book is not popular.

For, in truth, the qualities that distinguish Emily Brontë are not those which are of the first necessity to a novelist. She is without experience; her range of character is narrow and local; she has no atmosphere of broad humanity like George Eliot; she has not Jane

Austen's happy gift of making us love in a book what we have overlooked in life; we do not recognise in her the human truth and passion, the never-failing serene bitterness of humour, that have made for Charlotte Brontë a place between Cervantes and Victor Hugo.

Emily Brontë is of a different class. Her imagination is narrower, but more intense; she sees less, but what she sees is absolutely present: no writer has described the moors, the wind, the skies, with her passionate fidelity, but this is all of Nature that she describes. Her narrow fervid nature accounted as simple annoyance the trivial scenes and personages touched with immortal sympathy and humour in 'Villette' and 'Shirley'; Paul Emanuel himself appeared to her only as a pedantic and exacting taskmaster; but, on the other hand, to a certain class of mind, there is nothing in fiction so moving as the spectacle of Heathcliff dying of joy—an unnatural, unreal joy—his panther nature paralysed, *anéanti*, in a delirium of visionary bliss.

Only an imagination of the rarest power could conceive such a dénouement, requiting a life of black ingratitude by no mere common horrors, no vulgar Bedlam frenzy; but by the torturing apprehension of a happiness never quite grasped, always just beyond the verge of realisation. Only an imagination of the finest and rarest touch, absolutely certain of tread on that path of a single hair which alone connects this world with the land of dreams. Few have trod that perilous bridge with the fearlessness of Emily Brontë: that is her own ground and there she wins our highest praise; but place her on the earth, ask her to interpret for us the common lives of the surrounding people, she can give no answer. The swift and certain spirit moves with

the clumsy hesitating gait of a bird accustomed to soar.

She tells us what she saw; and what she saw and what she was incapable of seeing are equally characteristic. All the wildness of that moorland, all the secrets of those lonely farms, all the capabilities of the one tragedy of passion and weakness that touched her solitary life, she divined and appropriated; but not the life of the village at her feet, not the bustle of the mills, the riots, the sudden alternations of wealth and poverty; not the incessant rivalry of church and chapel; and while the West Riding has known the prototype of nearly every person and nearly every place in 'Jane Eyre' and 'Shirley,' not a single character in 'Wuthering Heights' ever climbed the hills round Haworth.

Say that two foreigners have passed through Staffordshire, leaving us their reports of what they have seen. The first, going by day, will tell us of the hideous blackness of the country; but yet more, no doubt, of that awful, patient struggle of man with fire and darkness, of the grim courage of those unknown lives; and he would see what they toil for, women with little children in their arms; and he would notice the blue sky beyond the smoke, doubly precious for such horrible environment. But the second traveller has journeyed through the night; neither squalor nor ugliness, neither sky nor children, has he seen, only a vast stretch of blackness shot through with flaming fires, or here and there burned to a dull red by heated furnaces; and before these, strange toilers, half naked, scarcely human, and red in the leaping flicker and gleam of the fire. The meaning of their work he could not see, but a fearful and impressive phantasmagoria of flame and blackness and fiery energies at work in the encompassing night.

So differently did the black country of this world appear to Charlotte, clear-seeing and compassionate, and to Emily Brontë, a traveller through the shadows. Each faithfully recorded what she saw, and the place was the same, but how unlike the vision! The spectacles of temperament colour the world very differently for each beholder; and, to understand the vision, we too should for a moment look through the seer's glass. To gain some such transient glance, to gain and give some such momentary insight into the character of Emily Brontë, has been the aim I have tried to make in this book. That I have not fulfilled my desire is perhaps inevitable—the task has been left too long. If I have done anything at all I feel that much of the reward is due to my many and generous helpers. Foremost among them I must thank Dr. Ingham, my kind host at Haworth, Mrs. Wood, Mr. William Wood, Mrs. Brown, and Mrs. Ratcliffe of that parish—all of whom had known the now perished family of Brontë; and my thanks are due no less to Mr. T. Wemyss Reid, as will be seen further on, to Mr. J. H. Ingram, and to Mr. Biddell, who have collected much valuable information for my benefit; and most of all do I owe gratitude and thankfulness to Miss Ellen Nussey, without whose generous help my work must have remained most ignorant and astray. To her, had it been worthier, had it been all the subject merits, and yet without those shadows of gloom and trouble enjoined by the nature of the story; to her, could I only have spoken of the high noble character of Emily Brontë and not of the great trials of her life, I should have ventured to dedicate this study. But to Emily's friend I only offer what, through her, I have learned of Emily; she, who knew so little of Branwell's shames and sorrow is unconcerned with this, their sad and necessary record. Only the

lights and sunshine of my work I dedicate to her. It may be that I have given too great a share to the shadows, to the manifold follies and failures of Branwell Brontë. Yet in Emily Brontë's life the shaping influences were so few, and the sins of this beloved and erring brother had so large a share in determining the bent of her genius, that to have passed them by would have been to ignore the shock which turned the fantasy of the 'Poems' into the tragedy of 'Wuthering Heights.' It would have been to leave untold the patience, the courage, the unselfishness which perfected Emily Brontë's heroic character; and to have left her burdened with the calumny of having chosen to invent the crimes and violence of her *dramatis personæ*. Not so, alas! They were but reflected from the passion and sorrow that darkened her home; it was no perverse fancy which drove that pure and innocent girl into ceaseless brooding on the conquering force of sin and the supremacy of injustice.

She brooded over the problem night and day; she took its difficulties passionately to heart; in the midst of her troubled thoughts she wrote 'Wuthering Heights.' From the clear spirit which inspires the end of her work, we know that the storm is over; we know that her next tragedy would be less violent. But we shall never see it; for—and it is by this that most of us remember her—suddenly and silently she died.

She died, before a single word of worthy praise had reached her. She died with her work misunderstood and neglected. And yet not unhappy. For her home on the moors was very dear to her, the least and homeliest duties pleasant; she loved her sisters with devoted friendship, and she had many little happinesses in her patient, cheerful, unselfish life. Would that I could

show her as she was! — not the austere and violent poetess who, cuckoo-fashion, has usurped her place; but brave to fate and timid of man; stern to herself, forbearing to all weak and erring things; silent, yet sometimes sparkling with happy sallies. For to represent her as she was would be her noblest and most fitting monument.

CHAPTER I.

PARENTAGE.

EMILY BRONTË was born of parents without any peculiar talent for literature. It is true that her mother's letters are precisely and prettily written. It is true that her father published a few tracts and religious poems. But in neither case is there any vestige of literary or poetical endowment. Few, indeed, are the Parish Magazines which could not show among their contents poems and articles greatly superior to the weak and characterless effusions of the father of the Brontës. The fact seems important; because in this case not one member of a family, but a whole family, is endowed in more or less degree with faculties not derived from either parent.

For children may inherit genius from parents who are themselves not gifted, as two streaming currents of air unite to form a liquid with properties different from either; and never is biography more valuable than when it allows us to perceive by what combination of allied qualities, friction of opposing temperaments, recurrence of ancestral traits, the subtle thing we call character is determined. In this case, since, as I have said, the whole family manifested a brilliance not to be found in either parent, such a study would be peculiarly interesting. But, unfortunately, the history of the children's father and the constitution of the children's mother is all that is clear to our investigation.

Yet even out of this very short pedigree two important factors of genius declare themselves—two potent and shaping inheritances. From their father, Currer, Ellis, and Acton derived a strong will. From their mother, the disease that slew Emily and Anne in the prime of their youth and made Charlotte always delicate and ailing. In both cases the boy, Patrick Branwell, was very slightly affected; but he too died young, from excesses that suggest a taint of insanity in his constitution.

Insanity and genius stand on either side consumption, its worse and better angels. Let none call it impious or absurd to rank the greatest gift to mankind as the occasional result of an inherited tendency to tubercular disease. There are of course very many other determining causes; yet is it certain that inherited scrofula or phthisis may come out, not in these diseases, or not only in these diseases, but in an alteration, for better or for worse, of the condition of the mind. Out of evil good may come, or a worse evil.

The children's father was a nervous, irritable and violent man, who endowed them with a nervous organisation easily disturbed and an indomitable force of volition. The girls, at least, showed both these characteristics. Patrick Branwell must have been a weaker, more brilliant, more violent, less tenacious, less upright copy of his father; and seems to have suffered no modification from the patient and steadfast moral nature of his mother. She was the model that her daughters copied, [illegible] different degrees, both in character and health. [illegible]sion and will their father gave them. Their genius [illegible] from neither parent; but from the con- [illegible] natures.

[illegible] both sides, the children got a Celtic

strain; and this is a matter of significance, meaning a predisposition to the superstition, imagination and horror that is a strand in all their work. Their mother, Maria Branwell, was of a good middle-class Cornish family, long established as merchants in Penzance. Their father was the son of an Irish peasant, Hugh Prunty, settled in the north of Ireland, but native to the south.

The history of the Rev. Patrick Brontë, B.A. (whose fine Greek name, shortened from the ancient Irish appellation of Bronterre, was so naïvely admired by his children), is itself a remarkable and interesting story.

The Reverend Patrick Brontë was one of the ten children of a peasant proprietor at Ahaderg in county Down. The family to which he belonged inherited strength, good looks, and a few scant acres of potato-growing soil. They must have been very poor, those ten children, often hungry, cold and wet; but these adverse influences only seemed to brace the sinews of Patrick Prunty and to nerve his determination to rise above his surroundings. He grew up a tall and strong young fellow, unusually handsome with a well-shaped head, regular profile and fine blue eyes. A vivacious impressible manner effectually masked a certain selfishness and rigour of temperament which became plain in after years. He seemed a generous, quick, impulsive lad. When he was sixteen years of age Patrick left his father's roof resolved to earn a position for himself. At Drumgooland, a neighbouring hamlet, he opened what is called in Ireland a public school; a sort of hedge-school for village children. He stuck to his trade for five or six years, using his leisure to perfect himself in general knowledge, mathematics, and a smattering of Greek and Latin.

His efforts deserved to be crowned with success. The

Rev. Mr. Tighe, the clergyman of the parish, was so struck with Patrick Prunty's determination and ability that he advised him to try for admittance at one of the English universities; and when the young man was about five-and-twenty he went, with Mr. Tighe's help, to Cambridge, and entered at St. John's.

He left Ireland in July, 1802, never to visit it again. He never cared to look again on the scenes of his early struggle. He never found the means to revisit mother or home, friends or country. Between Patrick Brontë, proud of his Greek profile and his Greek name, the handsome undergraduate at St. John's, and the nine shoeless, hungry young Pruntys of Ahaderg, there stretched a distance not to be measured by miles. Under his warm and passionate exterior a fixed resolution to get on in the world was hidden; but, though cold, the young man was just and self-denying, and as long as his mother lived she received twenty pounds a year, spared with difficulty from his narrow income.

Patrick Brontë stayed four years at Cambridge; when he left he had dropped his Irish accent and taken his B.A. On leaving St. John's he was ordained to a curacy in Essex.

The young man's energy, of the sort that only toils to reach a given personal end, had carried him far on the way to success. At twenty hedge-schoolmaster at Drumgooland, Patrick Brontë was at thirty a respectable clergyman of the Church of England, with an assured position and respectable clerical acquaintance. He was getting very near the goal.

He did not stay long in Essex. A better curacy was offered to him at Hartshead, a little village between Huddersfield and Halifax in Yorkshire. While he was at Hartshead the handsome inflammable Irish curate

met Maria Branwell at her uncle's parsonage near Leeds. It was not the first time that Patrick Brontë had fallen in love; people in the neighbourhood used to smile at his facility for adoration, and thought it of a piece with his enthusiastic character. They were quite right; in his strange nature the violence and the coldness were equally genuine, both being a means to gratify some personal ambition, desire, or indolence. It is not an uncommon Irish type; self-important, upright, honourable, yet with a bent towards subtlety: abstemious in habit, but with freaks of violent self-indulgence; courteous and impulsive towards strangers, though cold to members of the household; naturally violent, and often assuming violence as an instrument of authority; selfish and dutiful; passionate, and devoid of intense affection.

Miss Branwell was precisely the little person with whom it was natural that such a man, a self-made man, should fall in love. She was very small, quiet and gentle, not exactly pretty, but elegant and ladylike. She was, indeed, a well-educated young lady of good connections; a very Phœnix she must have seemed in the eyes of a lover conscious of a background of Pruntyism and potatoes. She was about twenty-one and he thirty-five when they first met in the early summer of 1812. They were engaged in August. Miss Branwell's letters reveal a quiet intensity of devotion, a faculty of judgment, a willingness to forgive passing slights that must have satisfied the absolute and critical temper of her lover. Under the devotion and the quietness there is, however, the note of an independent spirit, and the following extract, with its capability of self-reliance and desire to rely upon another, reminds one curiously of passages in her daughter Charlotte's writings:—

"For some years I have been perfectly my own mis-

tress, subject to no control whatever; so far from it that my sisters, who are many years older than myself, and even my dear mother used to consult me on every occasion of importance, and scarcely ever doubted the propriety of my words and actions: perhaps you will be ready to accuse me of vanity in mentioning this, but you must consider that I do not boast of it. I have many times felt it a disadvantage, and although, I thank God, it has never led me into error, yet in circumstances of uncertainty and doubt I have deeply felt the want of a guide and instructor."

Years afterwards, when Maria Branwell's letters were given into the hands of her daughter Charlotte and that daughter's most dear and faithful friend, the two young women felt a keen pang of retrospective sympathy for the gentle independent little person who, even before her marriage, had time to perceive that her guide and instructor was not the infallible Mentor she had thought him at the first. I quote the words of Charlotte's friend, of more authority and weight on this matter than those of any other person living, taken from a manuscript which she has placed at my disposal:—

"Miss Branwell's letters showed that her engagement, though not a prolonged one, was not as happy as it ought to have been. There was a pathos of apprehension (though gently expressed) in part of the correspondence lest Mr. Brontë should cool in his affection towards her, and the readers perceived with some indignation that there had been a just cause for this apprehension. Mr. Brontë, with all his iron strength and power of will, had his weakness, and one which, wherever it exists, spoils and debases the character—he had *personal vanity.* Miss Branwell's finer nature rose above such weakness; but she suffered all the more from

evidences of it in one to whom she had given her affections and whom she was longing to look up to in all things."

On the 29th of December, 1812, this disillusioned, loving little lady was married to Patrick Brontë, from her uncle's parsonage near Leeds. The young couple took up their abode at Hartshead, Mr. Brontë's curacy. Three years afterwards they moved, with two little baby girls, Maria and Elizabeth, to a better living at Thornton. The country round is desolate and bleak; great winds go sweeping by; young Mrs. Brontë, whose husband generally sat alone in his study, would have missed her cheerful home in sunny Penzance (being delicate and prone to superstition), but that she was a patient and uncomplaining woman, and she had scant time for thought among her many cares for the thick-coming little lives that peopled her Yorkshire home. In 1816 Charlotte Brontë was born. In the next year Patrick Branwell. In 1818 Emily Jane. In 1819 Anne. Then the health of their delicate and consumptive mother began to break. After seven years' marriage and with six young children, Mr. and Mrs. Brontë moved on the 25th of February, 1820, to their new home at Haworth Vicarage.

The village of Haworth stands, steep and grey, on the topmost side of an abrupt low hill. Such hills, more steep than high, are congregated round, circle beyond circle, to the utmost limit of the horizon. Not a wood, not a river. As far as eye can reach these treeless hills, their sides cut into fields by grey walls of stone, with here and there a grey stone village, and here and there a grey stone mill, present no other colours than the singular north-country brilliance of the green grass, and the blackish grey of the stone. Now and then a top-

pling, gurgling mill-beck gives life to the scene. But the real life, the only beauty of the country, is set on the top of all the hills, where moor joins moor from Yorkshire into Lancashire, a coiled chain of wild free places. White with snow in winter, black at midsummer, it is only when spring dapples the dark heather-stems with the vivid green of the sprouting wortleberry bushes, only when in early autumn the moors are one humming mass of fragrant purple, that any beauty of tint lights up the scene. But there is always a charm in the moors for hardy and solitary spirits. Between them and heaven nothing dares to interpose. The shadows of the coursing clouds alter the aspect of the place a hundred times a day. A hundred little springs and streams well in its soil, making spots of livid greenness round their rise. A hundred birds of every kind are flying and singing there. Larks sing; cuckoos call; all the tribes of linnets and finches twitter in the bushes; plovers moan; wild ducks fly past; more melancholy than all, on stormy days, the white sea-mews cry, blown so far inland by the force of the gales that sweep irresistibly over the treeless and houseless moors. There in the spring you may take in your hands the weak, halting fledgelings of the birds; rabbits and game multiply in the hollows. There in the autumn the crowds of bees, mad in the heather, send the sound of their humming down the village street. The winds, the clouds, Nature and life, must be the friends of those who would love the moors.

But young Mrs. Brontë never could go on the moors. She was frail and weak, poor woman, when she came to live in the oblong grey stone parsonage on the windy top of the hill. The village ran sheer down at her feet; but she could not walk down the steep rough-paven

street, nor on the pathless moors. She was very ill and weak; her husband spent nearly all his time in the study, writing his poems, his tracts, and his sermons. She had no companions but the children. And when, in a very few months, she found that she was sickening of a cancer, she could not bear to see much of the children that she must leave so soon.

Who dare say if that marriage was happy? Mrs. Gaskell, writing in the life and for the eyes of Mr. Brontë, speaks of his unwearied care, his devotion in the night-nursing. But before that fatal illness was declared, she lets fall many a hint of the young wife's loneliness during her husband's lengthy, ineffectual studies; of her patient suffering of his violent temper. She does not say, but we may suppose, with what inward pleasure Mrs. Brontë witnessed her favourite silk dress cut into shreds because her husband's pride did not choose that she should accept a gift; or watched the children's coloured shoes thrown on the fire, with no money in her purse to get new ones; or listened to her husband's cavil at the too frequent arrival of his children; or heard the firing of his pistol-shots at the out-house doors, the necessary vent of a passion not to be wreaked in words. She was patient, brave, lonely, and silent. But Mr. Wemyss Reid, who has had unexampled facilities for studying the Brontë papers, does not scruple to speak of Mr. Brontë's "persistent coldness and neglect" of his wife, his "stern and peremptory" dealings with her, of her "habitual dread of her lordly master"; and the manuscript which I have once already quoted alludes to the "hard and inflexible will which raised itself sometimes into tyranny and cruelty." It is within the character of the man that all this should be true. Safely wed, the woman to whom he had made hot love would

experience no more of his impulsive tenderness. He had provided for her and done his duty; her duty was to be at hand when he needed her. Yet, imminent death once declared, all his uprightness, his sense of honour, would call on him to be careful to the creature he had vowed to love and cherish, all his selfishness would oblige him to try and preserve the mother of six little children under seven years of age. "They kept themselves very close," the village people said; and at least in this last illness the husband and wife were frequently together. Their love for each other, new revived and soon to close, seemed to exclude any thought of the children. We hear expressly that Mr. Brontë, from natural disinclination, and Mrs. Brontë, from fear of agitation, saw very little of the small earnest babies who talked politics together in the "children's study," or toddled hand in hand over the neighbouring moors.

Meanwhile the young mother grew weaker day by day, suffering great pain and often unable to move. But repining never passed her lips. Perhaps she did not repine. Perhaps she did not grieve to quit her harassed life, the children she so seldom saw, her constant pain, the husband "not dramatic enough in his perceptions to see how miserable others might be in a life that to him was all-sufficient." * For some months she lay still, asking sometimes to be lifted in bed that she might watch the nurse cleaning the grate, because she did it as they did in Cornwall. For some months she suffered more and more. In September, 1821, she died.

* Mrs. Gaskell.

CHAPTER II.

BABYHOOD.

AFTER his wife's death the Rev. Mr. Brontë's life grew yet more secluded from ordinary human interests. He was not intimate with his parishioners; scarcely more intimate with his children. He was proud of them when they said anything clever, for, in spite of their babyhood, he felt at such moments that they were worthy of their father; but their forlorn infancy, their helpless ignorance, was no appeal to his heart. Some months before his wife's death he had begun to take his dinner alone, on account of his delicate digestion; and he continued the habit, seeing the children seldom except at breakfast and tea, when he would amuse the elders by talking Tory politics with them, and entertain the baby, Emily, with his Irish tales of violence and horror. Perhaps on account of this very aloofness, he always had a great influence over the children; he did not care for any dearer relation.

His empty days were filled with occasional visits to some sick person in the village; with long walks alone over the moors, and with the composition of his 'Cottage in the Wood' and those grandiloquent sermons which still linger in the memory of Haworth. Occasionally a clergyman from one of the neighbouring villages would walk over to see him; but as Mrs. Brontë had died so soon after her arrival at Haworth their wives never

came, and the Brontë children had no playfellows in the vicarages near; nor were they allowed to associate with the village children.

This dull routine life suited Mr. Brontë. He had laboured for many years and now he took his repose. We get no further sign of the impatient energies of his youth. He had changed, developed; even as those sea-creatures develop, who, having in their youth fins, eyes and sensitive feelers, become, when once they find their resting-place, motionlessly attached to it, losing one after the other, sight, movement, and even sensation, everything but the faculty to adhere.

Meanwhile the children were left alone. For sympathy and amusement they only had each other to look to; and never were brother and sisters more devoted. Maria, the eldest, took care of them all—she was an old-fashioned, motherly little girl; frail and small in appearance, with thoughtful, tender ways. She was very careful of her five little ones, this seven-year-old mother of theirs, and never seems to have exerted the somewhat tyrannic authority usually wielded by such youthful guardians. Indeed, for all her seniority, she was the untidy one of the family herself; it was against her own faults only that she was severe. She must have been a very attaching little creature, with her childish delinquencies and her womanly cares; protecting her little family with gentle love and discussing the debates in Parliament with her father. Charlotte remembered her to the end of her life with passionate clinging affection and has left us her portrait in the pathetic figure of Helen Burns.

This delicate, weak-chested child of seven was the head of the nursery. Then came Elizabeth, less clearly individualised in her sisters' memory. She also bore in

her tiny body the seeds of fatal consumption. Next came impetuous Charlotte, always small and pale. Then red-headed, talkative Patrick Branwell. Lastly Emily and Anne, mere babies, toddling with difficulty over the paven path to the moors.

Such a family demanded the closest care, the most exact attention. This was perhaps impossible on an income of £200 a year, when the mother lay upstairs dying of a disease that required constant nursing. Still the conditions of the Brontës' youth were unnecessarily unhealthy. It could not be helped that these delicate children should live on the bleak wind-swept hill where consumption is even now a scourge; it could not be helped that their home was bounded on two sides by the village graveyard; it could not be helped that they were left without a mother in their babyhood; but never, short of neglect, were delicate children less considered.

The little ones, familiar with serious illness in the house, expected small indulgence. They were accustomed to think nothing so necessary as that they should amuse themselves in quiet, and keep out of the way. The lesson learned so young remained in the minds of the five sisters all their lives. From their infancy they were retired and good; it was only Patrick Branwell who sometimes showed his masculine independence by a burst of natural naughtiness. They were the quietest of children by nature and necessity. The rooms at Haworth Parsonage were small and few. There were in front two moderate-sized parlours looking on the garden, hat on the right being Mr. Brontë's study, and the larger one opposite the family sitting-room. Behind these was a sort of empty store-room and the kitchens. On the first floor there was a servants'-room, where the

two servants slept, over the back premises; and a bedroom over each of the parlours. Between these and over the entrance passage was a tiny slip of a room, scarcely larger than a linen-closet, scarcely wider than the doorway and the window-frame that faced each other at either end. During the last months of Mrs. Brontë's illness, when it became necessary that she should have a bedroom to herself, all the five little girls were put to sleep in this small and draughty closet, formerly the children's study. There can scarcely have been room to creep between their beds. Very quiet they must have been; for any childish play would have disturbed the dying mother on the one side, and the anxious irritable father on the other. And all over the house they must keep the same hushed calm, since the low stone-floored rooms would echo any noise. Very probably they were not unhappy children for all their quietness. They enjoyed the most absolute freedom, dearest possession of childhood. When they were tired of reading the papers (they seemed to have had no children's books), or of discussing the rival merits of Bonaparte and the Duke of Wellington, they were free to go along the paven way over the three fields at the back, till the last steyle-hole in the last stone wall let them through on to the wide and solitary moors. There in all weathers they might be found; there they passed their happiest hours, uncontrolled as the birds overhead.

One rule seems to have been made by their father for the management of these precocious children with their consumptive taint, with their mother dying of cancer—that one rule of Mr. Brontë's making, still preserved to us, is that the children should eat no meat. The Rev. Patrick Brontë, B.A., had grown to heroic proportions on potatoes; he knew no reason why his children should fare differently.

The children never grumbled; so Mrs. Brontë's sick-nurse told Mrs. Gaskell:

"You would not have known there was a child in the house, they were such still, noiseless, good little creatures. Maria would shut herself up in the children's study with a newspaper and be able to tell one everything when she came out; debates in Parliament, and I don't know what all. She was as good as a mother to her sisters and brother. But there never were such good children. I used to think them spiritless, they were so different to any children I had ever seen. In part, I set it down to a fancy Mr. Brontë had of not letting them have flesh-meat to eat. It was from no wish for saving, for there was plenty and even waste in the house, with young servants and no mistress to see after them; but he thought that children should be brought up simply and hardily: so they had nothing but potatoes for their dinner; but they never seemed to wish for anything else. They were good little creatures. Emily was the prettiest."

This pretty Emily of two years old was no mother's constant joy. That early shaping tenderness, those recurring associations of reverent love, must be always missing in her memories. Remembering her earliest childhood, she would recall a constant necessity of keeping joys and sorrows quiet, not letting others hear; she would recall the equal love of children for each other, the love of the only five children she knew in all the world; the free wide moors where she might go as she pleased, and where the rabbits played and the moor-game ran and the wild birds sang and flew.

Mrs. Brontë's death can have made no great difference to any of her children save Maria, who had been her constant companion at Thornton; friendly and helpful

as a little maiden of six can be to the worried, delicate mother of many babies. Emily and Anne would barely remember her at all. Charlotte could only just recall the image of her mother playing with Patrick Branwell one twilight afternoon. An empty room, a cessation of accustomed business, their mother's death can have meant little more than that to the younger children.

For about a year they were left entirely to their own devices, and to the rough care of kind-hearted, busy servants. They devised plays about great men, read the newspapers, and worshipped the Duke of Wellington, strolled over the moors at their own sweet will, knowing and caring absolutely for no creature outside the walls of their own home. To these free, hardy, independent little creatures Mr. Brontë announced one morning that their maiden aunt from Cornwall, their mother's eldest sister, was coming to superintend their education.

"Miss Branwell was a very small, antiquated little lady. She wore caps large enough for half-a-dozen of the present fashion, and a front of light auburn curls over her forehead. She always dressed in silk. She had a horror of the climate so far north, and of the stone floors in the Parsonage. . . . She talked a great deal of her younger days—the gaieties of her dear native town Penzance, the soft, warm climate, &c. She gave one the idea that she had been a belle among her own home acquaintance. She took snuff out of a very pretty gold snuff-box, which she sometimes presented to you with a little laugh, as if she enjoyed the slight shock of astonishment visible in your countenance. . . . She would be very lively and intelligent, and tilt arguments against Mr. Brontë without fear."

So Miss Ellen Nussey recalls the elderly, prim Miss Branwell about ten years later than her first arrival in

Yorkshire. But it is always said of her that she changed very little. Miss Nussey's striking picture will pretty accurately represent the maiden lady of forty, who, from a stringent and noble sense of duty, left her southern, pleasant home to take care of the little orphans running wild at Haworth Parsonage. It is easy to imagine with what horrified astonishment aunt and nieces must have regarded each others' peculiarities.

It was, no doubt, an estimable advantage for the children to have some related lady in authority over them. Henceforth their time was no longer free for their own disposal. They said lessons to their father, they did sewing with their aunt, and learned from her all housewifely duties. The advantage would have been a blessing had their aunt been a woman of sweet-natured, motherly turn; but the change from perfect freedom to her old-maidish discipline was not easy to bear—a bitter good, a strengthening but disagreeable tonic, making the children yet less expansive, yet more self-contained and silent. Patrick Branwell was the favourite with his aunt, the naughty, clever, brilliant, rebellious, affectionate Patrick. Next to him she always preferred the pretty, gentle baby Anne, with her sweet, clinging ways, her ready submission, her large blue eyes and clear pink-and-white complexion. Charlotte, impulsive, obstinate and plain, the rugged, dogged Emily, were not framed to be favourites with her. Many a fierce tussle of wills, many a grim listening to over-frivolous reminiscence, must have shown the aunt and her nieces the difference of their natures. Maria, too, the whilom head of the nursery, must have found submission hard; but hers was a singularly sweet and modest nature. Of Elizabeth but little is remembered.

Mr. Brontë, now that the children were growing out

of babyhood, seems to have taken a certain pride in them. Probably their daily lessons showed him the character and talent hidden under those pale and grave little countenances. In a letter to Mrs. Gaskell he recounts instances of their early talent. More home-loving fathers will smile at the simple yet theatric means he took to discover the secret of his children's real dispositions. 'Twas a characteristic inspiration, worthy the originator of the ancient name of Brontë. A certain simplicity of confidence in his own subtlety gives a piquant flavour to the manner of telling the tale:—

"A circumstance now occurs to my mind which I may as well mention. When my children were very young, when, as far as I can remember, the eldest was about ten years of age and the youngest four, thinking that they knew more than I had yet discovered, in order to make them speak with less timidity, I deemed that if they were put under a sort of cover I might gain my end; and happening to have a mask in the house I told them all to stand and speak boldly from under cover of the mask.

"I began with the youngest (Anne, afterwards Acton Bell), and asked what a child like her most wanted; she answered, 'Age and experience.' I asked the next (Emily, afterwards Ellis Bell) what I had best do with her brother Branwell, who sometimes was a naughty boy; she answered, 'Reason with him; and when he won't listen to reason whip him.' I asked Branwell what was the best way of knowing the difference between the intellects of men and women; he answered, 'By considering the difference between them as to their bodies.' I then asked Charlotte what was the best book in the world; she answered, 'The Bible.' And what was the next best; she answered, 'The book of Nature.' I

then asked the next (Elizabeth, who seems to have taken Miss Branwell's teaching to heart) what was the best mode of education for a woman; she answered, 'That which would make her rule her house well.' Lastly, I asked the oldest what was the best mode of spending time; she answered, 'By laying it out in preparation for a happy eternity.' I may not have given precisely their words, but I have nearly done so, as they have made a deep and lasting impression on my memory. The substance, however, was exactly what I have stated."

The severely practical character of Emily's answer is a relief from the unchildish philosophy of Branwell, Maria, and the baby. A child of four years old who prefers age and experience to a tartlet and some sweets must be an unnatural product. But the Brontës seem to have had no childhood; unlimited discussion of debates, long walks without any playfellows, the free perusal of Methodist magazines, this is the pabulum of their infancy. Years after, when they asked some school-children to tea, the clergyman's young daughters had to ask their little scholars to teach them how to play. It was the first time they had ever cared to try.

What their childhood had really taught them was the value of their father's quaint experiment. They learned to speak boldly from under a mask. Restrained, enforcedly quiet, assuming a demure appearance to cloak their passionate little hearts, the five sisters never spoke their inmost mind in look, word, or gesture. They saved the leisure in which they could not play to make up histories, dramas, and fairy tales, in which each let loose, without noise, without fear of check, the fancies they never tried to put into action as other children are wont to. Charlotte wrote tales of heroism and adventure. Emily cared more for fairy tales, wild, unnatural,

strange fancies, suggested no doubt in some degree by her father's weird Irish stories. Already in her nursery the peculiar bent of her genius took shape.

Meanwhile the regular outer life went on—the early rising, the dusting and pudding-making, the lessons said to their father, the daily portion of sewing accomplished in Miss Branwell's bedroom, because that lady grew more and more to dislike the flagged flooring of the sitting-room. Every day, some hour snatched for a ramble on the moors; peaceful times in summer when the little girls took their sewing under the stunted thorns and currants in the garden, the clicking sound of Miss Branwell's pattens indistinctly heard within. Happy times when six children, all in all to each other, told wonderful stories in low voices for their own entrancement. Then, one spring, illness in the house; the children suffering a complication of measles and whooping-cough. They never had such happy times again, for it was thought better that the two elders should go away after their sickness; should get their change of air at some good school. Mr. Brontë made inquiries and heard of an institution established for clergymen's daughters at Cowan's Bridge, a village on the high road between Leeds and Kendal. After some demurring the school authorities consented to receive the children, now free from infection, though still delicate and needing care. Thither Mr. Brontë took Maria and Elizabeth in the July of 1824. Emily and Charlotte followed in September.

CHAPTER III.

COWAN'S BRIDGE.

"IT was in the year 1823 that the school for clergymen's daughters was first projected. The place was only then contemplated as desirable in itself, and as a place which might probably be feasible at some distant day. The mention of it, however, to only two friends in the South having met with their warm approbation and a remittance of £70, an opening seemed to be made for the commencement of the work.

"With this sum in hand, in a reliance upon Him who has all hearts at his disposal, and to whom belong the silver and the gold, the premises at Cowan's Bridge were purchased, the necessary repairs and additions proceeded with, and the school was furnished and opened in the spring of 1824. The whole expense of the purchase and outfit amounted to £2333 17*s.* 9*d.*

"The scanty provision of a large portion of the clergy of the Established Church has long been a source of regret; and very efficient means have been adopted in various ways to remedy it. The sole object of the Clergy Daughters' School is to add, in its measure, to these means, by placing a good female education within reach of the poorest clergy. And by them the seasonable aid thus afforded has been duly appreciated. The anxiety and toil which necessarily attend the management of such an institution have been abundantly repaid

by the gratitude which has been manifested among the parents of the pupils.

"It has been a very gratifying circumstance that the Clergy Daughters' School has been enabled to follow up the design of somewhat kindred institutions in London. Pupils have come to it as apprentices from the Corporation of the Sons of the Clergy; and likewise from the Clergy Orphan School, in which the education is of a limited nature and the pupils are not allowed to remain after the age of sixteen.

"The school is situated in the parish of Tunstall, on the turnpike road from Leeds to Kendal, between which towns a coach runs daily, and about two miles from the town of Kirkby Lonsdale.

"Each pupil pays £14 a year (half in advance) for clothing, lodging, boarding, and educating; £1 entrance towards the expense of books, and £3 entrance for pelisses, frocks, bonnets, &c., which they wear all alike.* So that the first payment which a pupil is required to bring with her is £11; and the subsequent half-yearly payment £7. If French, music, or drawing is learnt, £3 a year additional is paid for each of these.

"The education is directed according to the capacities of the pupils and the wishes of their friends. In all cases the great object in view is their intellectual and religious improvement; and to give that plain and useful education which may best fit them to return with respectability and advantage to their own homes; or to maintain themselves in the different stations of life to which Providence may call them."

. . . . . Here comes some explanation of the treasurer's accounts. Then the report recommences:—

* It is very much wished that the pupils should wear only their school dress during the vacations.

"Low as the terms are, it has been distressing to discover that in many cases clergymen who have applied on behalf of their daughters have been unable to avail themselves of the benefits of the school from the inadequacy of their means to raise the required payments.

The projectors' object will not be fully realised until the means are afforded of reducing the terms still lower, in extreme cases, at the discretion of the committee. And he trusts that the time will arrive when, either by legacies or otherwise, the school may be placed within the reach of those of the clergy for whom it is specially intended—namely, the *most* destitute.

"The school is open to the whole kingdom. Donors and subscribers gain the first attention in the recommendation of pupils; and the only inquiry made upon applications for admission is into the really necessitous circumstances of the applicant.

"There are now ninety pupils in the school (the number that can be accommodated) and several are waiting for admission.

"The school is under the care of Mrs. Harben, as superintendent, eight teachers, and two under-teachers.

"To God belongs the glory of the degree of success which has attended this undertaking, and which has far exceeded the most sanguine expectations. But the expression of very grateful acknowledgment must not be wanting towards the many benefactors who have so readily and so bountifully rendered their assistance. They have their recompense in the constant prayers which are offered up from many a thankful heart for all who support this institution."

Thus excellently and moderately runs the fourth year's report of the philanthropic Gymnase Moronval, evangelical Dotheboys Hall, familiar to readers of 'Jane Eyre.

When these congratulations were set in type, those horrors of starvation, cruelty, and fever were all accomplished which brought death to many children, and to those that lived an embittering remembrance of wrong. The two Brontë girls who survived their school days brought from them a deep distrust of human kindness, a difficult belief in sincere affection, not natural to their warm and passionate spirits. They brought away yet more enfeebled bodies, prone to disease; they brought away the memory of two dear sisters dead. "To God be the glory," says the report. Rather, let us pray, to the Rev. William Carus Wilson.

The report quoted above was issued six years after the autumn in which the little Brontës were sent to Cowan's Bridge; it was not known then in what terms one of those pale little girls would thank her benefactors, would speak of her advantages. She spoke at last, and generations of readers have held as filthy rags the righteousness of that institution, thousands of charitable hearts have beat high with indignation at the philanthropic vanity which would save its own soul by the sufferings of little children's tender bodies. Yet by an odd anomaly this ogre benefactor, this Brocklehurst, must have been a zealous and self-sacrificing enthusiast, with all his goodness spoiled by an imperious love of authority, an extravagant conceit.

It was in the first year of the school that the little Brontë girls left their home on the moors for Cowan's Bridge. It was natural that as yet many things should go wrong and grate in the unperfected order of the house; equally natural that the children should fail to make excuses: poor little prisoners pent, shivering and starved, in an unkind asylum from friends and liberty.

The school, long and low, more like an unpretending

farmhouse than an institution, forms two sides of an oblong. The back windows look out on a flat garden about seventy yards across. Part of the house was originally a cottage; the longer part a disused bobbin-mill, once turned by the stream which runs at the side of the damp, small garden. The ground floor was turned into schoolrooms, the dormitories were above, the dining-room and the teachers'-room were in the cottage at the end. All the rooms were paved with stone, low-ceiled, small-windowed; not such as are built for growing children, working in large classes together. No board of managers would permit the poorest children of our London streets to work in such ill-ventilated schoolrooms.

The bobbin-mill, not built for habitation, was, no doubt, faulty and insufficient in drainage. The situation of the house, chosen for its nearness to the stream, was damp and cold, on a bleak, unsheltered plain, picturesque enough in summer with the green alders overhanging the babbling beck, but in winter bitter chill. In this dreary house of machines, the place of the ousted wheels and springs was taken by ninety hungry, growing little human beings, all dressed alike in the coarse, ill-fitting garments of charity, all taught to look, speak, and think alike, all commended or held up to reprobation according as they resembled or diverged from the machines whose room they occupied and whose regular, thoughtless movement was the model of their life.

These children chiefly owed their excellent education, their miserable food and lodging, to the exertions of a rich clergyman from Willingdon, the nearest village. The Rev. Carus Wilson was a person of importance in the neighbourhood; a person who was looked to in emergencies, who prided himself on his prudence, fore-

sight, and efficiency in helping others. With this, none the less a man of real and zealous desire to do good, an energetic, sentient person capable of seeing evils and devising remedies. He wished to help: he wished no less that it should be known he had helped. Pitying the miserable conditions of many of his fellow-workers, he did not rest till he had founded a school where the daughters of the poor clergy should receive a fair education at a nominal price. When the money for the school was forthcoming, the property was vested in twelve trustees; Mr. Wilson was one. He was also treasurer and secretary. Nearly all the work, the power, the supervision, the authority of the affair, he took upon his shoulders. He was not afraid of work, and he loved power. He would manage, he would be overseer, he would guide, arrange, and counsel. So sure did he feel of his capacity to move all springs himself, that he seems to have exercised little pains and less discretion in appointing his subordinates. Good fortune sent him a gentle, wise, and noble woman as superintendent; but the other teachers were less capable, some snappish, some without authority. The housekeeper, who should have been chosen with the greatest care, since in her hands lay the whole management and preparation of the food of these growing children, was a slovenly, wasteful woman, taken from Mr. Wilson's kitchen, and much believed in by himself. Nevertheless to her door must we lay much of the misery of "Lowood."

The funds were small and somewhat uncertain. Honour and necessity alike compelled a certain economy. Mr. Wilson contracted for the meat, flour, and milk, and frequently himself inspected the supplies. But perhaps he did not inspect the kitchen. The "Lowood" scholars had many tales to tell of milk turned sour in dirty pans;

of burnt porridge with disgusting fragments in it from uncleanly cooking vessels; of rice boiled in water from the rain-cask, flavoured with dead leaves, and the dust of the roof; of beef salted when already tainted by decomposition; of horrible resurrection-pies made of unappetising scraps and rancid fat. The meat, flour, milk and rice were doubtless good enough when Mr. Wilson saw them, but the starved little school-girls with their disappointed hunger had neither the courage to complain nor the impartiality to excuse. For the rest, it was not easy to complain to Mr Wilson. His sour evangelicism led him to the same conclusion as the avarice of a less disinterested Yorkshire schoolmaster; he would have bade them conquer human nature. Being a very proud man, he sought to cultivate humility in others. The children were all dressed alike, all wearing in summer plain straw cottage bonnets, white frocks on Sundays and nankeen in the week; all wearing in winter purple stuff frocks and purple pelisses—a serviceable and appropriate raiment which should allow no envies, jealousies, or flatteries. They should not be vain, neither should they be greedy. A request for nicer-tasting food would have branded the asker with the lasting contempt of the Rev. William Carus Wilson, trustee, treasurer, and secretary. They were to learn that it was wrong to like pretty things to wear, nice things to eat, pleasant games to play; these little scholars taken half on charity. Mr. Wilson was repulsed by the apple-and-pegtop side of a child's nature; he deliberately ignored it.

Once in this grim, cold, hungry house of charity, there was little hope of escape. All letters and parcels were inspected by the superintendent; no friends of the pupils were allowed in the school, except for a short call

of ceremony. But it is probable that Maria and Elizabeth, sent on before, had no thought of warning their smaller sisters. So destitute of all experience were they, that probably they imagined all schools like Cowan's Bridge; so anxious to learn, that no doubt they willingly accepted the cold, hunger, deliberate unkindness, which made their childhood anxious and old.

The lot fell heaviest on the elder sister, clever, gentle, slovenly Maria. The principal lesson taught at Cowan's Bridge was the value of routine.

Maria, with her careless ways, ready opinions, gentle loving incapacity to become a machine, Maria was at discord with every principle of Cowan's Bridge. She incurred the bitter resentment of one of the teachers, who sought all means of humiliating and mortifying the sweet-natured, shiftless little creature. When, in September, bright, talkative Charlotte and baby Emily came to Cowan's Bridge, they found their idolised little mother, their Maria, the butt, laughingstock and scapegrace of the school.

Things were better for the two younger ones, Charlotte, a bright clever little girl, and Emily, the prettiest of the little sisters, "a darling child, under five years of age, quite the pet nursling of the school." * But though at first, no doubt, these two babies were pleased by the change of scene and the companionship of children, trouble was to befall them. Not the mere distasteful scantiness of their food, the mere cold of their bodies; they saw their elder sister grow thinner, paler day by day, no care taken of her, no indulgence made for her weakness. The poor ill-used, ill-nourished child grew very ill without complaining; but at last even the authorities at Cowan's Bridge perceived that she was

* Mrs. Harben to Mrs. Gaskell.

dying. They sent for Mr. Brontë in the spring of 1825. He had not heard of her illness in any of his children's letters, duly inspected by the superintendent. He had heard no tales of poor food, damp rooms, neglect. He came to Cowan's Bridge and saw Maria, his clever little companion, thin, wasted, dying. The poor father felt a terrible shock. He took her home with him, away from the three little sisters who strained their eyes to look after her. She went home to Haworth. A few days afterwards she died.

Not many weeks after Maria's death, when the spring made Lowood bearable, when the three saddened little sisters no longer waked at night for the cold, no longer lame with bleeding feet, could walk in the sunshine and pick flowers, when April grew into May, an epidemic of sickness came over Cowan's Bridge. The girls one by one grew weak and heavy, neither scolding nor texts roused them now; instead of spending their play-hours in games in the sweet spring air, instead of picking flowers or running races, these growing children grew all languid, flaccid, indolent. There was no stirring them to work or play. Increasing illness among the girls made even their callous guardians anxious at last. Elizabeth Brontë was one of the first to flag. It was not the fever that ailed her, the mysterious undeclared fever that brooded over the house; her frequent cough, brave spirits, clear colour pointed to another goal. They sent her home in the care of a servant; and before the summer flushed the scanty borders of flowers on the newest graves in Haworth churchyard, Elizabeth Brontë was dead, no more to hunger, freeze, or sorrow. Her hard life of ten years was over. The second of the Brontë sisters had fallen a victim to consumption.

Discipline was suddenly relaxed for those remaining

behind at Cowan's Bridge. There was more to eat, for there were fewer mouths to feed; there was more time to play and walk, for there were none to watch and restrain the eager children, who played, eat, shouted, ran riot, with a certain sense of relief, although they knew they were only free because death was in the house and pestilence in the air.

The woody hollow of Cowan's Bridge was foggy, unwholesome, damp. The scholars underfed, cramped, neglected. Their strange indolence and heaviness grew stronger and stronger with the spring. All at once forty-five out of the eighty girls lay sick of typhus-fever. Many were sent home only to die, some died at Cowan's Bridge. All that could, sent for their children home. Among the few who stayed in the fever-breeding hollow, in the contaminated house, where the odours of pastilles and drugs blended with, but could not conquer, the faint sickening smell of fever and mortality, among these abandoned few were Charlotte and Emily Brontë.

Thanks to the free, reckless life, the sunshine, the novel abundance of food, the two children did not take the infection. Things, indeed, were brighter for them now, or would have been, could the indignant spirit in these tiny bodies have forgiven or forgotten the deaths of their two sisters.

Reform had come to Cowan's Bridge, and with swift strides cleared away the old order of things. The site was declared unhealthy; the clothing insufficient; the water fetid and brackish. When the doctor who inspected the school was asked to taste the daily food of the scholars he spat it out of his mouth. Everything, everything must be altered. It was a time of sore and grievous humiliation to Mr. Wilson. He had felt no qualms, no doubts; he had worked very hard, he

thought things were going very well. The accounts were in excellent order, the education thorough and good, the system elaborate, the girls really seemed to be acquiring a meek and quiet spirit; and, to quote the prospectus, "the great object in view is their intellectual and religious improvement." Then stepped in unreckoned-with disease, and the model institution became a by-word of reproach to the county and the order to which it belonged. People, however, were not unjust to the influential and wealthy treasurer, trustee, and secretary. They admitted his energy, financial capacities, and turn for organisation. All they did was to qualify the rigour of his management. He still continued treasurer, but the funds were entrusted to a committee. He kept his post of inspector, but assistants were appointed to share his responsibilities. The school was given in charge to a new housekeeper; larger and better rations of food were given out. Finally a subscription was set on foot to build a better house in a healthier spot. When Charlotte and Emily Brontë went home for the midsummer holidays, reform was in full swing at Cowan's Bridge.

They went home, two out of the four children who had left their happy home six months before. They went home to find no motherly Maria, no sturdy, patient Elizabeth. The walks on the moors, the tales under the thorn-trees must henceforth be incomplete. The two elders of that little band were no longer to be found in house or garden—they lay quiet under a large paving-stone close to the vicarage pew at church. The three little sisters, the one little brother, must have often thought on their quiet neighbours when the sermon was very long. Thus early familiarised and neighbourly with death. one of them at least, tall, courageous Emily,

grew up to have no dreary thoughts of it, neither any dreams of a far-off heaven.

When the holidays were over, the two sisters returned to school. Their father, strangely enough, had no fear to send them to that fatal place. Their aunt, with her two favourites at home, was not over-anxious. Charlotte and Emily went back to Cowan's Bridge. But before the winter they were ill: the damp air, the unhealthy site (for as yet the new house was not built) brought out the weakness of their constitutions. Bearing the elder sisters' fate in view, the authorities warned Mr. Brontë, and the two children came home to Haworth.

CHAPTER IV.

CHILDHOOD.

THE home to which Charlotte and Emily returned was not a very much more healthy spot than that they left; but it was home. It was windy and cold, and badly drained. Mr. Brontë was ever striving to stir up his parishioners to improve the sanitary conditions of the place; but for many years his efforts were in vain. The canny Yorkshire folk were loth to put their money underground, and it was hard to make them believe that the real cause of the frequent epidemics and fevers in Haworth was such as could be cured by an effective system of subsoil drainage. It was cheaper and easier to lay the blame at the doors of Providence. So the parson preached in vain. Well might he preach, for his own house was in the thick of the evil.

"As you left the Parsonage-gate you looked upon the stonecutter's chipping-shed, which was piled with slabs ready for use, and to the ear there was the incessant 'chip, chip' of the recording chisel as it graved in the 'In Memoriams' of the departed."

So runs Miss Nussey's manuscript. She also tells of the constant sound of the passing bell; of the frequent burials in the thronged churchyard. No cheerful, healthy home for sensitive, delicate children.

"From the Parsonage windows the first view was the

plot of grass edged by a wall, a thorn-tree or two, and a few shrubs and currant-bushes that did not grow. Next to these was the large and half-surrounding churchyard, so full of gravestones that hardly a strip of grass could be seen in it."

Beyond this the moors, the wild, barren, treeless moors, that stretch away for miles and miles, feeding a few herds of mountain sheep, harbouring some wild conies and hares, giving a nesting-place to the birds of heaven, and, for the use of man, neither grain nor pasturage, but quarries of stone and piles of peat luridly smouldering up there on autumn nights.

Such is the home to which Emily Brontë clung with the passionate love of the Swiss for his white mountains, with a homesickness in absence that strained the very cords of life. Yet her childhood in that motherless home had few of the elements of childish happiness, and its busy strictness of daily life was saddened by the loss of Maria and Elizabeth, dear, never-forgotten playfellows. Charlotte, now the eldest of the family, was only two years older than Emily, but her sense of responsibility made her seem quite of a different age. It was little Anne who was Emily's companion—delicate, shrinking, pretty Anne, Miss Branwell's favourite. Anne could enter only into the easiest or lightest of her sister's moods, and yet she was so dear that Emily never sought another friend. So from childhood she grew accustomed to keep her own confidence upon her deepest thoughts and liveliest fancies.

A quiet regular life—carpet-brushing, sewing, dusting in the morning. Then some necessary lessons said to their aunt upstairs; then, in the evening, while Mr. Brontë wrote his sermons in the study and Miss Branwell sat in her bedroom, the four children, alone in the parlour, or

sitting by the kitchen fire, while Tabby, the servant, moved briskly about, would write their magazines or make their plays.

There was a great deal about politics still in the plays. Mr. Brontë, who took a keen interest in the affairs of the world, always told the children the chief public news of the day, and let them read what newspapers and magazines they could lay hold on. So the little Brontës prattled of the Duke of Wellington when other children still have Jack the Giantkiller for a hero; the Marquis of Douro was their Prince Charming; their Yahoos, the Catholics; their potent evil genii the Liberal Ministry.

"Our plays were established," says Charlotte, the family chronicler, in her history of the year 1829: "'Young Men,' June, 1826; 'Our Fellows,' July, 1827; 'Islanders,' December, 1827. These are our three great plays that are not kept secret. Emily's and my best plays were established the 1st of December, 1827; the others, March, 1828. Best plays mean secret plays; they are very nice ones. All our plays are very strange ones. Their nature I need not write on paper, for I think I shall always remember them. The 'Young Men's' play took its rise from some wooden soldiers Branwell had; 'Our Fellows' from Æsop's Fables; and the 'Islanders' from several events which happened. I will sketch out the origin of our plays more explicitly if I can. First, 'Young Men.' Papa bought Branwell some wooden soldiers at Leeds; when papa came home it was night, and we were in bed, so next morning Branwell came to our door" (the little room over the passage: Anne slept with her aunt) "with a box of soldiers. Emily and I jumped out of bed, and I snatched up one and exclaimed, 'This is the Duke of Wellington! This shall be the Duke.'

When I had said this, Emily likewise took one up and said it should be hers; when Anne came down, she said one should be hers. Mine was the prettiest of the whole, the tallest and the most perfect in every part. Emily's was a grave-looking fellow, and we called him 'Gravey.' Anne's was a queer little thing, much like herself, and we called him 'Waiting-boy.' Branwell chose his, and called him Bonaparte."

In another play Emily chooses Sir Walter Scott, Mr. Lockhart and Johnny Lockhart as her representatives; Charlotte the Duke of Wellington, the Marquis of Douro, Mr. Abernethy, and Christopher North. This last personage was indeed of great importance in the eyes of the children, for *Blackwood's Magazine* was their favourite reading. On their father's shelves were few novels, and few books of poetry. The clergyman's study necessarily boasted its works of divinity and reference; for the children there were only the wild romances of Southey, the poems of Sir Walter Scott, left by their Cornish mother, and "some mad Methodist magazines full of miracles and apparitions and preternatural warnings, ominous dreams and frenzied fanaticism; and the equally mad letters of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe from the Dead to the Living," familiar to readers of 'Shirley.' To counterbalance all this romance and terror, the children had their interest in politics and *Blackwood's Magazine*, "the most able periodical there is," says thirteen-year-old Charlotte. They also saw *John Bull*, "a high Tory, very violent, the *Leeds Mercury*, *Leeds Intelligencer*, a most excellent Tory newspaper," and thus became accomplished fanatics in all the burning questions of the day.

Miss Branwell took care that the girls should not lack more homely knowledge. Each took her share in the

day's work, and learned all details of it as accurately as any German maiden at her cookery school. Emily took very kindly to even the hardest housework; there she felt able and necessary; and, doubtless, upstairs, grimly listening to prim Miss Branwell's stories of bygone gaieties, this awkward growing girl was glad to remember that she too was of importance to the household, despite her tongue-tied brooding.

The girls fared well enough; but not so their brother. Branwell's brilliant purposelessness, Celtic gaiety, love of amusement and light heart made him the most charming playfellow, but a very anxious charge. Friends advised Mr. Brontë to send his son to school, but the peculiar vanity which made him model his children's youth in all details on his own forbad him to take their counsel. Since he had fed on potatoes, his children should eat no meat. Since he had grown up at home as best he might, why should Patrick Branwell go to school? Every day the father gave a certain portion of his time to working with his boy; but a clergyman's time is not his own, and often he was called away on parish business. Doubtless Mr. Brontë thought these tutorless hours were spent, as he would have spent them, in earnest preparation of difficult tasks. But Branwell, with all his father's superficial charm of manner, was without the underlying strength of will, and he possessed, unchecked, the temptations to self-indulgence, to which his father seldom yielded, counteracting them rather by an ascetic regimen of life. These long afternoons were spent, not in work, but in mischievous companionship with the wilder spirits of the village, to whom "t' Vicar's Patrick" was the standard of brilliant leadership in scrapes.

No doubt their admiration flattered Branwell, and he enjoyed the noisy fun they had together. Nevertheless

he did not quite neglect his sisters. Charlotte has said that at this time she loved him even as her own soul—a serious phrase upon those serious lips. But it was Emily and Branwell who were most to each other: bright, shallow, exacting brother; silent, deep-brooding, unselfish sister, more anxious to give than to receive. In January, 1831, Charlotte went to school at Miss Wooler's, at Roe Head, twenty miles away; and Branwell and Emily were thrown yet more upon each other for sympathy and entertainment.

Charlotte stayed a year and a half at school, and returned in the July of 1832 to teach Emily and Anne what she had learnt in her absence; English-French, English and drawing was pretty nearly all the instruction she could give. Happily genius needs no curriculum. Nevertheless the sisters toiled to extract their utmost boon from such advantages as came within their range. Every morning from nine till half-past twelve they worked at their lessons; then they walked together over the moors, just coming into flower. These moors knew a different Emily to the quiet girl of fourteen who helped in the housework and learned her lessons so regularly at home. On the moors she was gay, frolicsome, almost wild. She would set the others laughing with her quaint humorous sallies and genial ways. She was quite at home there, taking the fledgeling birds in her hands so softly that they were not afraid, and telling stories to them. A strange figure—tall, slim, angular, with all her inches not yet grown; a quantity of dark-brown hair, deep beautiful hazel eyes that could flash with passion, features somewhat strong and stern, the mouth prominent and resolute.

The sisters, and sometimes Branwell, would go far on the moors; sometimes four miles to Keighley in the

hollow over the ridge, unseen from the heights, but brooded over always by a dim film of smoke, seemingly the steam rising from some fiery lake. The sisters now subscribed to a circulating library at Keighley, and would gladly undertake the rough walk of eight miles for the sake of bringing back with them a novel by Scott, or a poem by Southey. At Keighley, too, they bought their paper. The stationer used to wonder how they could get through so much.

Other days they went over Stanbury Moor to the Waterfall, a romantic glen in the heathy side of the hill where a little stream drips over great boulders, and where some slender delicate birches spring, a wonder in this barren country. This was a favourite haunt of Emily, and indeed they all loved the spot. Here they would use some of their paper, for they still kept up their old habit of writing tales and poems, and loved to scribble out of doors. And some of it they would use in drawing, since at this time they were taking lessons, and Emily and Charlotte were devoted to the art: Charlotte making copies with minuteness and exact fidelity; Emily drawing animals and still-life with far greater freedom and certainty of touch. Some of Charlotte's paper, also, must have gone in letter-writing. She had made friends at school, an event of great importance to that narrow circle. One of these friends, the dearest, was unknown to Haworth. Many a time must Emily and Anne have listened to accounts of the pretty, accomplished, lively girl, a favourite in many homes, who had won the heart of their shy plain sister. She was, indeed, used to a very different life, this fair young girl, but her bright youth and social pleasures did not blind her to the fact that oddly-dressed, old-fashioned Charlotte Brontë was the most remarkable person of her

acquaintance. She was the first, outside Charlotte's home, to discover her true character and genius; and that at an age, in a position, when most girls would be too busy with visions of a happy future for themselves to sympathise with the strange activities, the morbid sensitiveness, of such a mind as Charlotte possessed. But so early this girl loved her; and lives still, the last to have an intimate recollection of the ways, persons and habits of the Brontë household.

In September, 1832, Charlotte left home again on a fortnight's visit to the home of this dear friend. Branwell took her there. He had probably never been from home before. He was in wild spirits at the beauty of the house and grounds, inspecting, criticising everything, pouring out a stream of comments, rich in studio terms, taking views in every direction of the old battlemented house, and choosing "bits" that he would like to paint, delighting the whole family with his bright cleverness, and happy Irish ways. Meanwhile Charlotte looked on, shy and dull. "I leave you in Paradise!" cried Branwell, and betook himself over the moor to make fine stories of his visit to Emily and Anne in the bare little parlour at Haworth.

Charlotte's friend, Ellen, sent her home laden with apples for her two young sisters: "Elles disent qu'elles sont sûr que Mademoiselle E. est très-aimable et bonne; l'une et l'autre sont extrêmement impatientes de vous voir; j'espère que dans peu de mois elles auront ce plaisir ——" So writes Charlotte in the quaint Anglo-French that the friends wrote to each other for practice. But winter was approaching, and winter is dreary at Haworth. Miss Branwell persuaded the eager girls to put off their visitor till summer made the moors warm and dry, and beautiful, so that the young people could

spend much of their time out of doors. In the summer of 1833 Ellen came to Haworth.

Miss Ellen Nussey is the only person living who knew Emily Brontë on terms of intimate equality, and her testimony carries out that of those humbler friends who helped the parson's busy daughter in her cooking and cleaning; from all alike we hear of an active, genial, warm-hearted girl, full of humour and feeling to those she knew, though shy and cold in her bearing to strangers. A different being to the fierce impassioned Vestal who has seated herself in Emily's place of remembrance.

In 1833 Emily was nearly fifteen, a tall long-armed girl, full grown, elastic of tread; with a slight figure that looked queenly in her best dresses, but loose and boyish when she slouched over the moors, whistling to her dogs, and taking long strides over the rough earth. A tall, thin, loose-jointed girl—not ugly, but with irregular features and a pallid thick complexion. Her dark brown hair was naturally beautiful, and in later days looked well, loosely fastened with a tall comb at the back of her head; but in 1833 she wore it in an unbecoming tight curl and frizz. She had very beautiful eyes of hazel colour. "Kind, kindling, liquid eyes," says the friend who survives all that household. She had an aquiline nose, a large expressive, prominent mouth. She talked little. No grace or style in dress belonged to Emily, but under her awkward clothes her natural movements had the lithe beauty of the wild creatures that she loved. She was a great walker, spending all her leisure on the moors. She loved the freedom there, the large air. She loved the creatures, too. Never was a soul with a more passionate love of Mother Earth, of every weed and flower, of every bird, beast, and insect that lived. She would have peopled the house with pets had

not Miss Branwell kept her niece's love of animals in due subjection. Only one dog was allowed, who was admitted into the parlour at stated hours, but out of doors Emily made friends with all the beasts and birds. She would come home carrying in her hands some young bird or rabbit, and softly talking to it as she came. "Ee, Miss Emily," the young servant would say, "one would think the bird could understand you." "I am sure it can," Emily would answer. "Oh, I am sure it can."

The girls would take their friend long walks on the moor. When they went very far, Tabby, their old factotum, insisted on escorting them, unless Branwell took that duty on himself, for they were still "childer" in her eyes. Emily and Anne walked together. They and Branwell would ford the streams and place stepping-stones for the elder girls. At every point of view, at every flower, the happy little party would stop to talk, admire, and theorise in concert. Emily's reserve had vanished as morning mists. She was full of glee and gladness, on her own demesne, no longer awkward and silent. On fine days Emily and Anne would persuade the others to walk to the Waterfall which made an island of brilliant green turf in the midst of the heather, set with clear springs, shaded with here and there a silver birch, and dotted with grey boulders, beautiful resting-places. Here the four girls—the "quartette" as they called themselves—would go and sit and listen to Ellen's stories of the world they had not seen. Or Emily, half-reclining on a slab of stone, would play like a young child with the tadpoles in the water, making them swim about, and she would fall to moralising on the strong and the weak, the brave and the cowardly, as she chased the creatures with her hand. Having rested, they would trudge home again a merry party, save when they met

some wandering villager. Then the parson's three daughters would walk on, hushed and timid.

At nine the sewing was put by, and the four girls would talk and laugh, pacing round the parlour. Miss Branwell went to bed early, and the young people were left alone in the curtainless clean parlour, with its grey walls and horse-hair furniture. But with good company no room is poorly furnished; and they had much to say, and much to listen to, on nights when Branwell was at home. Oftenest they must have missed him; since, whenever a visitor stayed at the "Black Bull," the little inn across the churchyard, the landlord would send up for "T' Vicar's Patrick" to come and amuse the guests with his brilliant rhodomontade.

Not much writing went on in Ellen's presence, but gay discussion, making of stories, and serious argument. They would talk sometimes of dead Maria and Elizabeth, always remembered with an intensity of love. About eight o'clock Mr. Brontë would call the household to family prayers: and an hour afterwards he used to bolt the front door, and go upstairs to bed, always stopping at the sitting-room with a kindly admonition to the "children" not to be late. At last the girls would stop their chatter, and retire for the night, Emily giving her bed to the visitor and taking a share of the servants' room herself.

At breakfast the next morning Ellen used to listen with shrinking amazement to the stories of wild horror that Mr. Brontë loved to relate, fearful stories of superstitious Ireland, or barbarous legends of the rough dwellers on the moors; Ellen would turn pale and cold to hear them. Sometimes she marvelled as she caught sight of Emily's face, relaxed from its company rigour, while she stooped down to hand her porridge-bowl

to the dog: she wore a strange expression, gratified, pleased, as though she had gained something which seemed to complete a picture in her mind. For this silent Emily, talking little save in rare bursts of wild spirits; this energetic housewife, cooking and cleaning as though she had no other aim in view than the providing for the day's comfort; this was the same Emily who at five years of age used to startle the nursery with her fantastic fairy stories. Two lives went on side by side in her heart, neither ever mingling with or interrupting the other. Practical housewife with capable hands, dreamer of strange horrors: each self was independent of the companion to which it was linked by day and night. People in those days knew her but as she seemed—"T' Vicar's Emily"—a shy awkward girl, never teaching in the Sunday school like her sisters, never talking with the villagers like merry Branwell, but very good and hearty in helping the sick and distressed: not pretty in the village estimation—a "slinky lass," no prim, trim little body like pretty Anne, nor with Charlotte Brontë's taste in dress; just a clever lass with a spirit of her own. So the village judged her. At home they loved her with her strong feelings, untidy frocks, indomitable will, and ready contempt for the common-place; she was appreciated as a dear and necessary member of the household. Of Emily's deeper self, her violent genius, neither friend nor neighbour dreamed in those days. And to-day it is only this Emily who is remembered.

Days went on, pleasant days of autumn, in which Charlotte and her friend roamed across the blooming moors, in which Anne and Emily would take their little stools and big desks into the garden, and sit and scribble under the currant-bushes, stopping now and then to pluck the ripe fruit. Then came chill October, bringing

cold winds and rain. Ellen went home, leaving an empty chair in the quartette, leaving Charlotte lonelier, and even Emily and Anne a little dull. "They never liked any one as well as you," says Charlotte.

Winter came, more than usually unhealthy that year, and the moors behind the house were impassable with snow and rain. Miss Branwell continually bemoaned the warm and flowery winters of Penzance, shivering over the fire in her bedroom; Mr. Brontë was ill; outside the air was filled with the mournful sound of the passing bell. But the four young people sitting round the parlour hearth-place were not cold or miserable. They were dreaming of a happy and glorious future, a great career in Art; not for Charlotte, not for Emily or Anne, they were only girls; their dreams were for the hope and promise of the house—for Branwell.

CHAPTER V.

GOING TO SCHOOL.

EMILY was now sixteen years old, and though the people in the village called her "t' cleverest o' t' Brontë childer," she had little to show of her cleverness. Her education was as home-made as her gowns, not such as would give distinction to a governess; and a governess Emily would have to be. The Brontë sisters were too severe and noble in their theories of life ever to contemplate marriage as a means of livelihood; but even worldly sisters would have owned that there was little chance of impatient Emily marrying at all. She was almost violent in her dislike of strangers. The first time that Ellen stayed at Haworth, Charlotte was ill one day and could not go out with her friend. To their surprise Emily volunteered to take the stranger a walk over the moors. Charlotte waited anxiously for their return, fearing some outbreak of impatience or disdain on the part of her untamable sister. The two girls at last came home. "How did Emily behave?" asked Charlotte, eagerly, drawing her friend aside. She had behaved well; she had shown her true self, her noble, energetic, truthful soul, and from that day there was a real friendship between the gentle Ellen and the intractable Emily; but none the less does Charlotte's question reveal in how different a manner the girl regarded strangers as a rule. In after days when the curates, looking for Mr. Brontë

in his study, occasionally found Emily there instead, they used to beat such a hasty retreat that it was quite an established joke at the Parsonage that Emily appeared to the outer world in the likeness of an old bear. She hated strange faces and strange places. Her sisters must have seen that such a temperament, if it made her unlikely to attract a husband or to wish to attract one, also rendered her lamentably unfit to earn her living as a governess. In those days they could not tell that the defect was incurable, a congenital infirmity of nature; and doubtless Charlotte, the wise elder sister, thought she had found a cure for both the narrow education and the narrow sympathies when she suggested that Emily should go to school. She writes to her friend in July, 1835:—

"I had hoped to have had the extreme pleasure of seeing you at Haworth this summer, but human affairs are mutable, and human resolutions must bend to the course of events. We are all about to divide, break up, separate. Emily is going to school, Branwell is going to London, and I am going to be a governess. This last determination I formed myself, knowing I should have to take the step sometime, and 'better sune as syne,' to use a Scotch proverb; and knowing well that Papa would have enough to do with his limited income, should Branwell be placed at the Royal Academy and Emily at Roe Head. Where am I going to reside? you will ask. Within four miles of you, at a place neither of us are unacquainted with, being no other than the identical Roe Head mentioned above. Yes! I am going to teach in the very school where I was myself taught. Miss Wooler made me the offer, and I preferred it to one or two proposals of private governess-ship which I had before received. I am sad—very sad—at the

thoughts of leaving home; but duty—necessity—these are stern mistresses, who will not be disobeyed. Did I not once say you ought to be thankful for your independence? I felt what I said at the time, and I repeat it now with double earnestness; if anything would cheer me it is the idea of being so near you. Surely you and Polly will come and see me; it would be wrong in me to doubt it; you were never unkind yet. Emily and I leave home on the 27th of this month; the idea of being together consoles us both somewhat, and, truth, since I must enter a situation, 'My lines have fallen in pleasant places.' I both love and respect Miss Wooler." *

The wrench of leaving home, so much dreaded by Charlotte, was yet sharper to her younger sister, morbidly fearful of strangers, eccentric, unable to live without wide liberty. To go to school; it must have had a dreadful sound to that untamable, free creature, happiest alone with the dogs on the moors, with little sentiment or instinct for friendship; no desire to meet her fellows. Emily was perfectly happy at Haworth cooking the dinner, ironing the linen, writing poems at the Waterfall, taking her dog for miles over the moors, pacing round the parlour with her arm round gentle Anne's waist. Now she would have to leave all this, to separate from her dear little sister. But she was reasonable and just, and, feeling the attempt should be made, she packed up her scanty wardrobe, and, without repining, set out with Charlotte for Roe Head.

Charlotte knew where she was going. She loved and respected Miss Wooler; but with what anxiety must Emily have looked for the house where she was to live and not to be at home. At last she saw it, a cheerful, roomy, country house, standing a little apart in a field.

* Mrs. Gaskell.

There was a wide and pleasant view of fields and woods; but the green prospect was sullied and marred by the smoke from the frequent mills. Green fields, grey mills, all told of industry, labour, occupation. There was no wild stretch of moorland here, no possibility of solitude. I think when Emily Brontë saw the place, she must have known very well she would not be happy there.

"My sister Emily loved the moors," says Charlotte, writing of these days in the latter solitude—"flowers brighter than the rose bloomed in the blackest of the heath for her; out of a sullen hollow in a livid hillside her mind could make an Eden. She found in the bleak solitude many and dear delights; and not the least and best-loved was liberty. Liberty was the breath of Emily's nostrils; without it she perished. The change from her own home to a school, and from her own very noiseless, very secluded, but unrestricted and unartificial mode of life to one of disciplined routine (though under the kindest auspices) was what she failed in enduring. Her nature was here too strong for her fortitude. Every morning, when she woke, the visions of home and the moors rushed on her, and darkened and saddened the day that lay before her. Nobody knew what ailed her but me. I knew only too well. In this struggle her health was quickly broken: her white face, attenuated form, and failing strength threatened rapid decline. I felt in my heart she would die if she did not go home."

Thus looking on, Charlotte grew alarmed. She remembered the death of Maria and Elizabeth, and feared, feared with anguish, lest this best-beloved sister should follow them. She told Miss Wooler of her fear, and the schoolmistress, conscious of her own kindness and a little resentful at Emily's distress, consented that the girl should be sent home without delay. She did not care for Emily,

and was not sorry to lose her. So in October she returned to Haworth, to the only place where she was happy and well. She returned to harder work and plainer living than she had known at school; but also to home, liberty, comprehension, her animals, and her flowers. In her native atmosphere she very soon recovered the health and strength that seemed so natural to her swift spirit; that were, alas, so easily endangered. She had only been at school three months.

Even so short an absence may very grievously alter the aspect of familiar things. Haworth itself was the same; prim, tidy Miss Branwell still pattered about in her huge caps and tiny clogs; the Vicar still told his horrible stories at breakfast, still fought vain battles with the parishioners who would not drain the village, and the women who would dry their linen on the tombstones. Anne was still as transparently pretty, as pensive and pious as of old; but over the hope of the house, the dashing, clever Branwell, who was to make the name of Brontë famous in art, a dim, tarnishing change had come. Emily must have seen it with fresh eyes, left more and more in Branwell's company, when, after the Christmas holidays, Anne returned with Charlotte to Roe Head.

There is in none of Charlotte's letters any further talk of sending Branwell to the Royal Academy. He earnestly desired to go, and for him, the only son, any sacrifice had willingly been made. But there were reasons why that brilliant unprincipled lad should not be trusted now, alone in London. Too frequent had been those visits to the "Black Bull," undertaken, at first, to amuse the travellers from London, Leeds and Manchester, who found their evenings dull. The Vicar's lad was following the proverbial fate of parsons' sons.

Little as they foreboded the end in store, greatly as they hoped all his errors were a mere necessary attribute of manliness, the sisters must have read in his shaken nerves the dissipation for which their clever Branwell was already remarkable in Haworth. It is true that to be sometimes the worse for drink was no uncommon fault fifty years ago in Yorkshire; but the gradual coarsening of Branwell's nature, the growing flippancy, the altered health, must have given a cruel awakening to his sisters' dreams for his career. In 1836 this deterioration was at the beginning; a weed in bud that could only bear a bitter and poisonous fruit. Emily hoped the best; his father did not seem to see his danger; Miss Branwell spoiled the lad; and the village thought him a mighty pleasant young gentleman with a smile and a bow for every one, fond of a glass and a chat in the pleasant parlour of the "Black Bull" at nights; a gay, feckless, red-haired, smiling young fellow, full of ready courtesies to all his friends in the village; yet, none the less as full of thoughtless cruelties to his friends at home.

For the rest, he had nothing to do, and was scarcely to blame if he could not devote sixteen hours a day to writing verses for the *Leeds Mercury*, his only ostensible occupation. It seems incredible that Mr. Brontë, who well understood the peculiar temptations to which his son lay open, could have suffered him to loaf about the village, doing nothing, month after month, lured into ill by no set purpose, but by a weak social temper and foolish friends. Yet so it was, and with such training, little hope of salvation could there be for that vain, somewhat clever, untruthful, fascinating boy.

So things went on, drearily enough in reality, though perhaps more pleasantly in seeming—for Branwell, with

his love of approbation and ready affectionateness, took all trouble consistent with self-indulgence to avoid the noise of his misdemeanours reaching home. Thus things went on till Charlotte returned from Miss Wooler's with little Anne in the midsummer holidays of 1836.

An interval of happiness to lonely Emily; Charlotte's friend came to the grey cold-looking Parsonage, enlivening that sombre place with her gay youth and sweet looks. Home with four young girls in it was more attractive to Branwell than the alluring parlour of the "Black Bull." The harvest moon that year can have looked on no happier meeting. "It would not be right," says the survivor of those eager spirits, "to pass over one record which should be made of the sisters' lives together, after their school-days, and before they were broken in health by their efforts to support themselves, that at this time they had all a taste of happiness and enjoyment. They were beginning to feel conscious of their powers, they were rich in each other's companionship, their health was good, their spirits were high, there was often joyousness and mirth; they commented on what they read; analysed articles and their writers also; the perfection of unrestrained talk and intelligence brightened the close of the days which were passing all too swiftly. The evening march in the sitting-room, a constant habit learned at school, kept time with their thoughts and feelings, it was free and rapid; they marched in pairs, Emily and Anne, Charlotte and her friend, with arms twined round each other in child-like fashion, except when Charlotte, in an exuberance of spirit, would for a moment start away, make a graceful pirouette (though she had never learned to dance) and return to her march."

So the evenings passed and the days, in happy fashion

for a little while. Then Charlotte and Anne went back to Miss Wooler's, and Emily, too, took up the gauntlet against necessity. She was not of a character to let the distastefulness of any duty hinder her from undertaking it. She was very stern in her dealings with herself, though tender to the erring, and anxious to bear the burdens of the weak. She allowed no one but herself to decide what it behoved her to do. She could not see Charlotte labour, and not work herself. At home she worked, it is true, harder than servants; but she felt it right not only to work, but to earn. So, having recovered her natural strength, she left Haworth in September, and Charlotte writes from school to her friend: "My sister Emily has gone into a situation as teacher in a large school near Halifax. I have had one letter from her since her departure; it gives an appalling account of her duties; hard labour from six in the morning to eleven at night, with only one half-hour of exercise between. This is slavery. I fear she can never stand it."

She stood it, however, all that term; came back to Haworth for a brief rest at Christmas, and again left it for the hated life she led, drudging among strangers. But when spring came back, with its feverish weakness, with its beauty and memories, to that stern place of exile, she failed. Her health broke down, shattered by long-resisted homesickness. Weary and mortified at heart, Emily again went back to seek life and happiness on the wild moors of Haworth.

CHAPTER VI.

GIRLHOOD AT HAWORTH.

THE next two years passed very solitarily for Emily at Haworth; the Brontës were too poor for all to stay at home, and since it was definitely settled that Emily could not live away, she worked hard at home while her sisters went out in the world to gain their bread. She had no friend besides her sisters; far-off Anne was her only confidant. Outside her own circle the only person that she cared to meet was Charlotte's friend Ellen, and, of course, Ellen did not come to Haworth while Charlotte was away. Branwell, too, was absent. His first engagement was as usher in a school; but, mortified by the boys' sarcasms on his red hair and "downcast smallness," he speedily threw up his situation and returned to Haworth to confide his wounded vanity to the tender mercies of the rough and valiant Emily, or to loaf about the village seeking readier consolation.

Then he went as private tutor to a family in Broughton-in-Furness. One letter of his thence despatched to some congenial spirit in Haworth, long since dead, has been lent to me by the courtesy of Mr. William Wood, one of the last of Branwell's companions, in whose possession the torn, faded sheet remains. Much of it is unreadable from accidental rents and the purposed excision of private passages, and part of that which can be read cannot be quoted; such as it is, the letter is

valuable as showing what things in life seemed desirable and worthy of attainment to this much-hoped-in brother of the austere Emily, the courageous Charlotte, the pious Anne.

"Broughton-in-Furness, March 15.

"OLD KNAVE OF TRUMPS,

"Don't think I have forgotten you though I have delayed so long in writing to you. It was my purpose to send you a yarn as soon as I could find materials to spin one with. And it is only just now I have had time to turn myself round and know where I am.

"If you saw me now you would not know me, and you would laugh to hear the character the people give me. Oh, the falsehood and hypocrisy of this world! I am fixed in a little town retired by the seashore, embowered in woody hills that rise round me, huge, rocky, and capped with clouds. My employer is a retired county magistrate and large landholder, of a right hearty, generous disposition. His wife is a quiet, silent, amiable woman; his sons are two fine, spirited lads. My landlord is a respectable surgeon, and six days out of seven as drunk as a lord; his wife is a bustling, chattering, kind-hearted soul; his daughter—oh! death and damnation! Well, what am I? that is, what do they think I am?—a most sober, abstemious, patient, mild-hearted, virtuous, gentlemanly philosopher, the picture of good works, the treasure-house of righteous thought. Cards are shuffled under the tablecloth, glasses are thrust into the cupboard, if I enter the room. I take neither spirit, wine, nor malt liquors. I dress in black, and smile like a saint or martyr. Every lady says, 'What a good young gentleman is the Postlethwaites' tutor.' This is fact, as I am a living soul, and right comfortably do I laugh at them; but in this humour do

I mean them to continue. I took a half-year's farewell of old friend whisky at Kendal the night after I [left]. There was a party of gentlemen at the Royal Hotel; I joined them and ordered in supper and 'toddy as hot as Hell.' They thought I was a physician, and put me into the chair. I gave them some toasts of the stiffest sort . . . . . washing them down at the same time till the room spun round and the candles danced in their eyes. One was a respectable old gentleman with powdered head, rosy cheeks, fat paunch, and ringed fingers . . . he led off with a speech, and in two minutes, in the very middle of a grand sentence, stopped, wagged his head, looked wildly round, stammered, coughed, stopped again, called for his slippers, and so the waiter helped him to bed. Next a tall Irish squire and a native of the land of Israel began to quarrel about their countries, and in the warmth of argument discharged their glasses each at his neighbour's throat, instead of his own. I recommended blisters, bleeding [here illegible], so I flung my tumbler on the floor, too, and swore I'd join old Ireland. A regular rumpus ensued, but we were tamed at last, and I found myself in bed next morning, with a bottle of porter, a glass, and corkscrew beside me. Since then I have not tasted anything stronger than milk and water, nor, I hope, shall I till I return at Midsummer, when we will see about it. I am getting as fat as Prince Win at Springhead and as godly as his friend Parson Winterbottom. My hand shakes no longer: I write to the bankers at Ulverston with Mr. Postlethwaite, and sit drinking tea and talking slander with old ladies. As to the young ones, I have one sitting by me just now, fair-faced, blue-eyed, dark-haired, sweet eighteen. She little thinks the Devil is as near her. I was delighted to see thy note, old Squire,

but don't understand one sentence—perhaps you will know what I mean. . . . . .

. . . . . .

How are all about you? I long . . . [all torn next] everything about Haworth folk. Does little Nosey think I have forgotten him. No, by Jupiter! nor is Alick either. I'll send him a remembrance one of these days. But I must talk to some one prettier; so good night, old boy. Write directly, and believe me to be thine,

"THE PHILOSOPHER."

Branwell's boasted reformation was not kept up for long. Soon he came back as heartless, as affectionate, as vain, as unprincipled as ever, to laugh and loiter about the steep street of Haworth. Then he went to Bradford as a portrait-painter, and—so impressive is audacity—actually succeeded for some months in gaining a living there, although his education was of the slenderest, and, judging from the specimens still treasured in Haworth, his natural talent on a level with that of the average new student in any school of art. His tawny mane, his pose of untaught genius, his verses in the poet's corner of the paper could not for ever keep afloat this untaught and thriftless portrait-painter of twenty. Soon there came an end to his painting there. He disappeared from Bradford suddenly, heavily in debt, and was lost to sight, until unnerved, a drunkard, and an opium-eater, he came back to home and Emily at Haworth.

Meanwhile impetuous Charlotte was growing nervous and weak, gentle Anne consumptive and dejected, in their work away from home; and Emily was toiling from dawn till dusk with her old servant Tabby for the old

aunt who never cared for her, and the old father always courteous and distant.

They knew the face of necessity more nearly than any friend's, those Brontë girls, and the pinch of poverty was for their own foot; therefore were they always considerate to any that fell into the same plight. During the Christmas holidays of 1837, old Tabby fell on the steep and slippery street and broke her leg. She was already nearly seventy, and could do little work; now her accident laid her completely aside, leaving Emily, Charlotte, and Anne to spend their Christmas holidays in doing the housework and nursing the invalid. Miss Branwell, anxious to spare the girls' hands and her brother-in-law's pocket, insisted that Tabby should be sent to her sister's house to be nursed and another servant engaged for the Parsonage. Tabby, she represented, was fairly well off, her sister in comfortable circumstances; the Parsonage kitchen might supply her with broths and jellies in plenty, but why waste the girls' leisure and scanty patrimony on an old servant competent to keep herself. Mr. Brontë was finally persuaded, and his decision made known. But the girls were not persuaded. Tabby, so they averred, was one of the family, and they refused to abandon her in sickness. They did not say much, but they did more than say—they starved. When the tea was served, the three sat silent, fasting. Next morning found their will yet stronger than their hunger—no breakfast. They did the day's work, and dinner came. Still they held out, wan and sunk. Then the superiors gave in.

The girls gained their victory—no stubborn freak, but the right to make a generous sacrifice, and to bear an honourable burden.

That Christmas, of course, there could be no visiting

nor the next. Tabby was slow in getting well; but she did not outweary the patience of her friends.

Two years later, Charlotte writes to her old schoolfellow:—

"December 21, 1839.

"We are at present, and have been during the last month, rather busy, as for that space of time we have been without a servant, except a little girl to run errands. Poor Tabby became so lame that she was at length obliged to leave us. She is residing with her sister, in a little house of her own, which she bought with her own savings a year or two since. She is very comfortable, and wants nothing. As she is near we see her very often. In the meantime, Emily and I are sufficiently busy, as you may suppose: I manage the ironing and keep the rooms clean; Emily does the baking and attends to the kitchen. We are such odd animals that we prefer this mode of contrivance to having a new face among us. Besides, we do not despair of Tabby's return, and she shall not be supplanted by a stranger in her absence. I excited aunt's wrath very much by burning the clothes the first time I attempted to iron; but I do better now. Human feelings are queer things; I am much happier blackleading the stoves, making the beds, and sweeping the floors at home than I should be living like a fine lady anywhere else."*

The year 1840 found Emily, Branwell, and Charlotte all at home together. Unnerved and dissipated as he was, Branwell was still a welcome presence; his gay talk still awakened glad promises in the ambitious and loving household which hoped all things from him. His mistakes and faults they pardoned; thinking, poor souls,

* Mrs. Gaskell.

that the strong passions which led him astray betokened a strong character and not a powerless will.

It was still to Branwell that they looked for the fame of the family. Their poems, their stories, were to these girls but a legitimate means of amusement and relief. The serious business of their life was to teach, to cook, to clean; to earn or save the mere expense of their existence. No dream of literary fame gave a purpose to the quiet days of Emily Brontë. Charlotte and Branwell, more impulsive, more ambitious, had sent their work to Southey, to Coleridge, to Wordsworth, in vain, pathetic hope of encouragement, or recognition. Not so the sterner Emily, to whom expression was at once a necessity and a regret. Emily's brain, Emily's locked desk, these and nothing else knew the degree of her passion, her genius, her power. And yet acknowledged power would have been sweet to that dominant spirit.

Meanwhile the immediate difficulty was to earn a living. Even those patient and courageous girls could not accept the thought of a whole lifetime spent in dreary governessing by Charlotte and Anne, in solitary drudgery by homekeeping Emily. One way out of this hateful vista seemed not impossible of attainment. For years it was the wildest hope, the cherished dream of the author of 'Wuthering Heights' and the author of 'Villette.' And what was this dear and daring ambition?—to keep a ladies' school at Haworth.

Far enough off, difficult to reach, it looked to them, this paltry common-place ideal of theirs. For the house with its four bedrooms would have to be enlarged; for the girls' education, with its Anglo-French and stumbling music, would have to be adorned by the requisite accomplishments. This would take time; time and money; two luxuries most hard to get for the Vicar of Haworth's

harassed daughters. They would sigh, and suddenly stop in their making of plans and drawing up of circulars. It seemed so difficult.

One person, indeed, might help them. Miss Branwell had saved out of her annuity of £50 a year. She had a certain sum; small enough, but to Charlotte and Emily it seemed as potent as the fairy's wand. The question was, would she risk it?

It seemed not. The old lady had always chiefly meant her savings for the dear prodigal who bore her name, and Emily and Charlotte were not her favourites. The girls indeed only asked for a loan, but she doubted, hesitated, doubted again. They were too proud to take an advantage so grudgingly proffered; and while their talk was still of what means they might employ, while they still painfully toiled through improper French novels as "the best substitute for French conversation," they gave up the dream for the present, and Charlotte again looked out for a situation. Nearly a year elapsed before she found it—a happy year, full of plans and talks with Emily and free from any more pressing anxiety than Anne's delicate health always gave her sisters. Branwell was away and doing well as station-master at Luddendenfoot, "set off to seek his fortune in the wild, wandering, adventurous, romantic, knight-errant-like capacity of clerk on the Leeds and Manchester Railway." Ellen came to stay at Haworth in the summer; it was quite sociable and lively now in the grey house on the moors; for, compelled by failing health, Mr. Brontë had engaged the help of a curate, and the Haworth curate brought his clerical friends about the house, to the great disgust of Emily, and the half-sentimental fluttering of pensive Anne, which laid on Charlotte the responsibility of talking for all three.

In the holidays when Anne was at home all the old glee and enjoyment of life returned. There was, moreover, the curate, "bonnie, pleasant, light-hearted, good-tempered, generous, careless, crafty, fickle, and unclerical," to add piquancy to the situation. "He sits opposite to Anne at church, sighing softly, and looking out of the corners of his eyes—and she is so quiet, her look so downcast; they are a picture," says merry Charlotte. This first curate at Haworth was exempted from Emily's liberal scorn; he was a favourite at the vicarage, a clever, bright-spirited, and handsome youth, greatly in Miss Branwell's good graces. He would tease and flatter the old lady with such graciousness as made him ever sure of a welcome; so that his daily visits to Mr. Brontë's study were nearly always followed up by a call in the opposite parlour, when Miss Branwell would frequently leave her upstairs retreat and join in the lively chatter. She always presided at the tea-table, at which the curate was a frequent guest, and her nieces would be kept well amused all through the tea hour by the curate's piquant sallies, baffling the old lady in her little schemes of control over the three high-spirited girls. None enjoyed the fun more than quiet Emily, always present and amused, "her countenance glimmering as it always did when she enjoyed herself," Miss Ellen Nussey tells me. Many happy legends, too familiar to be quoted here, record the light heart and gay spirit that Emily bore in those untroubled days. Foolish, pretty little stories of her dauntless protection of the other girls from too pressing suitors. Never was duenna so gallant, so gay, and so inevitable. In compliment to the excellence of her swashing and martial outside on such occasions, the little household dubbed her "The Major," a name

that stuck to her in days when the dash and gaiety of her soldiery bearing was sadly sobered down, and only the courage and dauntless heart remained.

But in these early days of 1841, Emily was as happy as other healthy country girls in a congenial home. "She did what we did," says Miss Nussey, "and never absented herself when she could avoid it—life at this period must have been sweet and pleasant to her." An equal unchequered life, in which trifles seemed of great importance. We hear of the little joys and adventures of those days, so faithfully and long remembered, with a pathetic pleasurableness. So slight they are, and all their colour gone, like pressed roses, though a faint sweetness yet remains. The disasters when Miss Branwell was cross and in no humour to receive her guests; the long-expected excitement of a walk over the moors to Keighley where the curate was to give a lecture, the alarm and flurry when the curate, finding none of the four girls had ever received a valentine, proposed to send one to each on the next Valentine's Day. "No, no, the elders would never allow it, and yet it would certainly be an event to receive a valentine; still, there would be such a lecture from Miss Branwell." "Oh no," he said, "I shall post them at Bradford." And to Bradford he walked, ten miles and back again, so that on the eventful 14th of February the anxiously-expected postman brought four valentines, all on delicately tinted paper, all enhanced by a verse of original poetry, touching on some pleasant characteristic in each recipient. What merriment and comparing of notes! What pleased feigning of indignation! The girls determined to reward him with a Rowland for his Oliver, and Charlotte wrote some rhymes full of fun and raillery which all the girls

signed—Emily entering into all this with much spirit and amusement—and finally despatched in mystery and secret glee.

At last this pleasant fooling came to an end. Charlotte advertised for a place, and found it. While she was away she had a letter from Miss Wooler, offering Charlotte the goodwill of her school at Dewsbury Moor. It was a chance not to be lost, although what inducement Emily and Charlotte could offer to their pupils it is not easy to imagine. But it was above all things necessary to make a home where delicate Anne might be sheltered, where homesick Emily could be happy, where Charlotte could have time to write, where all might live and work together. Miss Wooler's offer was immediately accepted. Miss Branwell was induced to lend the girls £100. No answer came from Miss Wooler. Then ambitious Charlotte, from her situation away, wrote to Miss Branwell at Haworth * :—

"September 29, 1841.

"DEAR AUNT,

"I have heard nothing of Miss Wooler yet since I wrote to her, intimating that I would accept her offer. I cannot conjecture the reason of this long silence, unless some unforeseen impediment has occurred in concluding the bargain. Meantime a plan has been suggested and approved by Mr. and Mrs. —— and others which I wish now to impart to you. My friends recommend, if I desire to secure permanent success, to delay commencing the school for six months longer, and by all means to contrive, by hook or by crook, to spend the intervening time in some school on the Continent. They say schools in England are so numerous, competition so great, that without some such step towards attaining

* Mrs. Gaskell.

superiority, we shall probably have a very hard struggle and may fail in the end. They say, moreover, that the loan of £100, which you have been so kind as to offer us, will perhaps not be all required now, as Miss Wooler will lend us the furniture; and that, if the speculation is intended to be a good and successful one, half the sum, at least, ought to be laid out in the manner I have mentioned, thereby insuring a more speedy repayment both of interest and principal.

"I would not go to France or to Paris. I would go to Brussels, in Belgium. The cost of the journey there, at the dearest rate of travelling, would be £5, living is there little more than half as dear as it is in England, and the facilities for education are equal or superior to any place in Europe. In half a year I could acquire a thorough familiarity with French. I could improve greatly in Italian and even get a dash at German; *i.e.* providing my health continued as good as it is now. . . .

"These are advantages which would turn to real account when we actually commenced a school; and, if Emily could share them with me, we could take a footing in the world afterwards which we never can do now. I say Emily instead of Anne; for Anne might take her turn at some future period, if our school answered. I feel certain, while I am writing, that you will see the propriety of what I say. You always like to use your money to the best advantage. You are not fond of making shabby purchases; when you do confer a favour it is often done in style; and depend upon it £50 or £100, thus laid out, would be well employed. Of course, I know no other friend in the world to whom I could apply on this subject besides yourself. I feel an absolute conviction that if this advantage were allowed us, it would be the making of us for life. Papa will

perhaps think it a wild and ambitious scheme; but who ever rose in the world without ambition. When he left Ireland to go to Cambridge University he was as ambitious as I am now."

That was true. It must have struck a vibrant chord in the old man's breast. Absorbed in parish gossip and his 'Cottage Poems,' caring no longer for the world but only for newspaper reports of it, actively idle, living a resultless life of ascetic self-indulgence, the Vicar of Haworth was very proud of his energetic past. He had always held it up to his children as a model for them to copy. Charlotte's appeal would certainly secure her father as an ally to her cause. Miss Branwell, on the other hand, would not wish for displays of ambition in her already too irrepressible nieces. But she was getting old; it would be a comfort to her, after all, to see them settled, and prosperously settled through her generosity. "I look to you, Aunt, to help us. I think you will not refuse," Charlotte had said. How, indeed, could Miss Branwell, living in their home, be happy, and refuse?

Yet many discussions went on before anxious Charlotte got the answer. Emily, whom it concerned as nearly, must have listened waiting in a strange perturbation of hope and fear. To leave home—she knew well what it meant. Since she was six years old she had never left Yorkshire; but those months of wearying homesickness at Roe Head, at Halifax, must have most painfully rushed back upon her memory. Haworth was health, content, the very possibility of existence to this girl. To leave Haworth for a strange town beyond the seas, to see strange faces all round, to hear and speak a strange language, Charlotte's welcome prospect of adventure must have taken a nightmare shape to Emily.

And for this she must hope; this she must desire, plead for if necessary, and at least uphold. For Charlotte said the thing was essential to their future; and in all details of management, Charlotte's word was law to her sisters. Even Emily, the independent, indomitable Emily, so resolute in keeping to any chosen path, looked to Charlotte to choose the way in practical affairs.

At length consent was secured, written and despatched. Gleeful Charlotte gave notice to her employers and soon set out for home. There was much to be done. "Letters to write to Brussels, to Lille and to London, lots of work to be done, besides clothes to repair." It was decided that the sisters should give up their chance of the school at Dewsbury Moor, since the site was low and damp, and had not suited Anne. On their return from Brussels they were to set up a school in some healthy seaside place in the East Riding. Burlington was the place where their fancy chiefly dwelt. To this beautiful and healthy spot, fronting the sea, eager pupils would flock for the benefit of instruction by three daughters of a clergyman, "educated abroad" (for six months) speaking thorough French, improved Italian and a dash of German. A scintillating programme of accomplishment danced before their eyes.

There were, however, many practical difficulties to be vanquished first. The very initial step, the choice of a school, was hard to take. Charlotte writes to Ellen:—

"January 20, 1842.

"We expect to leave England in about three weeks, but we are not yet certain as to the day, as it will depend on the convenience of a French lady now in London, Madame Marzials, under whose escort we are to sail. Our place of destination is changed. Papa received an un-

favourable account from Mr. or rather from Mrs. Jenkins of the French schools in Bruxelles, representing them as of an inferior caste in many respects. On further inquiry an institution at Lille in the North of France was highly recommended by Baptist Noel and other clergymen, and to that place it is decided that we are to go. The terms are £50 a year for each pupil for board and French alone; but a separate room will be allowed for this sum; without this indulgence they are something lower. I considered it kind in aunt to consent to an extra sum for a separate room. We shall find it a great privilege in many ways. I regret the change from Bruxelles to Lille on many accounts."

For Charlotte to regret the change was for an improvement to be discovered. She had set her heart on going to Brussels; Mrs. Jenkins redoubled her efforts and at length discovered the Pensionnat of Madame Héger in the Rue d'Isabelle.

Thither, as all the world is aware, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, both of age, went to school.

"We shall leave England in about three weeks." The words had a ring of happy daring in Charlotte's ears. Since at six years of age she had set out alone to discover the Golden City, romance, discovery, adventure, were sweet promises to her. She had often wished to see the world; now she will see it. She had thirsted for knowledge; here is the source. She longed to add new notes to that gamut of human character which she could play with so profound a science; she shall make a masterpiece out of her acquisitions. At this time her letters are full of busy gaiety, giving accounts of her work, making plans, making fun. As happy and hopeful a young woman as any that dwells in Haworth parish.

Emily is different. It is she who imagined the girl in heaven who broke her heart with weeping for earth, till the angels cast her out in anger, and flung her into the middle of the heath, to wake there sobbing for joy. She did not care to know fresh people; she hates strangers; to walk with her bulldog, Keeper, over the moors is her best adventure. To learn new things is very well, but she prizes above everything originality and the wild provincial flavour of her home. What she strongly, deeply loves is her moorland home, her own people, the creatures on the heath, the dogs who always feed from her hands, the flowers in the bleak garden that only grow at all because of the infinite care she lavishes upon them. The stunted thorn under which she sits to write her poems, is more beautiful to her than the cedars of Lebanon. To each and all of these she must now bid farewell. It is in a different tone that she says in her adieus, "We shall leave England in about three weeks."

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE RUE D'ISABELLE.

THE Rue d'Isabelle had a character of its own. It lies below your feet as you stand in the Rue Royale, near the statue of General Béliard. Four flights of steps lead down to the street, half garden, half old houses, with at one end a large square mansion, owning the garden that runs behind it and to the right of it. The house is old; a Latin inscription shows it to have been given to the great Guild of Cross-bowmen by Queen Isabelle in the early years of the 17th century. The garden is older; long before the Guild of the Cross-bowmen of the Great Oath, in deference to the wish of Queen Isabelle, permitted the street to be made through it, the garden had been their exercising place. There Isabelle herself, a member of their order, had shot down the bird. But the garden had a yet more ancient past; when apple-trees, pear-trees and alleys of Bruges cherries, when plots of marjoram and mint, of thyme and sweet-basil, filled the orchard and herbary of the Hospital of the Poor. And the garden itself, before trees or flowers were planted, had resounded with the yelp of the Duke's hounds, when, in the thirteenth century, it had been the Fosse-aux-chiens. This historic garden, this mansion, built by a queen for a great order, belonged in 1842 to Monsieur and Madame Héger, and was a famous Pensionnat de Demoiselles.

There the Vicar of Haworth brought his two daughters one February day, spent one night in Brussels and went straight back to his old house on the moors, so modern in comparison with the mansion in Rue d'Isabelle. A change, indeed, for Emily and Charlotte. Even now, Brussels (the headquarters of Catholicism far more than modern Rome) has a taste for pageantry that recalls mediæval days. The streets decked with boughs and strewn with flowers, through which pass slowly the processions of the Church, white-clad children, boys like angels scattering roses, standard-bearers with emblazoned banners. Surpliced choristers singing Latin praises, acolytes in scarlet swinging censers, reliquaries and images, before which the people fall down in prayer; all this to-day is no uncommon sight in Brussels, and must have been yet more frequent in 1842.

The flower-market out of doors, with clove-pinks, tall Mary-lilies and delicate *roses d'amour*, filling the quaint mediæval square before the beautiful old façade of the Hôtel de Ville. Ste.-Gudule with its spires and arches; the Montagne de la Cour (almost as steep as Haworth street), its windows ablaze at night with jewels; the little, lovely park, its great elms just coming into leaf, its statues just bursting from their winter sheaths of straw; the galleries of ancient pictures, their walls a sober glory of colours, blues, deep as a summer night, rich reds, brown golds, most vivid greens.

All this should have made an impression on the two home-keeping girls from Yorkshire; and Charlotte, indeed, perceived something of its beauty and strangeness. But Emily, from a bitter sense of exile, from a natural narrowness of spirit, rebelled against it all as an insult to the memory of her home—she longed, hopelessly, uselessly, for Haworth. The two Brontës were very

different to the Belgian school-girls in Madame Héger's Pensionnat. They were, for one thing, ridiculously old to be at school—twenty-four and twenty-six—and they seemed to feel their position; their speech was strained and odd; all the "sceptical, wicked, immoral French novels, over forty of them, the best substitute for French conversation to be met with," which the girls had toiled through with so much singleness of spirit, had not cured the broadness of their accent nor the artificial idioms of their Yorkshire French. Monsieur Héger, indeed, considered that they knew no French at all. Their manners, even among English people, were stiff and prim; the hearty, vulgar, genial expansion of their Belgian schoolfellows must have made them seem as lifeless as marionettes. Their dress—Haworth had permitted itself to wonder at the uncouthness of those amazing leg-of-mutton sleeves (Emily's pet whim in and out of fashion), at the ill-cut lankness of those skirts, clumsy enough on round little Charlotte, but a very caricature of mediævalism on Emily's tall, thin, slender figure. They knew they were not in their element and kept close together, rarely speaking. Yet Monsieur Héger, patiently watching, felt the presence of a strange power under those uncouth exteriors.

An odd little man of much penetration, this French schoolmaster. "*Homme de zèle et de conscience, il possède à un haut degré l'éloquence du bon sens et du cœur.*" Fierce and despotic in the exaction of obedience, yet tender of heart, magnanimous and tyrannical, absurdly vain and absolutely unselfish. His wife's school was a kingdom to him; he brought to it an energy, a zeal, a faculty of administration worthy to rule a kingdom. It was with the delight of a botanist discovering a rare plant in his garden, of a politician detecting a

future statesman in his nursery, that he perceived the unusual faculty which lifted his two English pupils above their schoolfellows. He watched them silently for some weeks. When he had made quite sure, he came forwards and, so to speak, claimed them for his own.

Charlotte at once accepted the yoke. All that he set her to do she toiled to accomplish; she followed out his trains of thought; she adopted the style he recommended; she gave him in return for all his pains the most unflagging obedience, the affectionate comprehension of a large intelligence. She writes to Ellen of her delight in learning and serving: "It is very natural to me to submit, very unnatural to command."

Not so with Emily. The qualities which her sister understood and accepted, irritated her unspeakably. The masterfulness in little things, the irritability, the watchfulness of the fiery little professor of rhetoric were utterly distasteful to her. She contradicted his theories to his face; she did her lessons well, but as she chose to do them. She was as indomitable, fierce, unappeasable, as Charlotte was ready and submissive. And yet it was Emily who had the larger share of Monsieur Héger's admiration. Egotistic and exacting he thought her, who never yielded to his petulant, harmless egoism, who never gave way to his benevolent tyranny; but he gave her credit for logical powers, for a capacity for argument unusual in a man, and rare, indeed, in a woman. She, not Charlotte, was the genius in his eyes, although he complained that her stubborn will rendered her deaf to all reason, when her own determination, or her own sense of right, was concerned. He fancied she might be a great historian, so he told Mrs. Gaskell. "Her faculty of imagination was such, her views of scenes and characters

would have been so vivid and so powerfully expressed, and supported by such a show of argument that it would have dominated over the reader, whatever might have been his previous opinions or his cooler perception of the truth. She should have been a man: a great navigator!" cried the little, dark, enthusiastic rhetorician. "Her powerful reason would have deduced new spheres of discovery from the knowledge of the old; and her strong imperious will would never have been daunted by opposition or difficulty; never have given way but with life!"

Yet they were never friends; though Monsieur Héger could speak so well of Emily at a time, be it remembered, when it was Charlotte's praises that were sought, when Emily's genius was set down as a lunatic's hobgoblin of nightmare potency. He and she were alike too imperious, too independent, too stubborn. A couple of swords, neither of which could serve to sheathe the other.

That time in Brussels was wasted upon Emily. The trivial characters which Charlotte made immortal merely annoyed her. The new impressions which gave another scope to Charlotte's vision were nothing to her. All that was grand, remarkable, passionate, under the surface of that conventional Pensionnat de Demoiselles, was invisible to Emily. Notwithstanding her genius she was very hard and narrow.

Poor girl, she was sick for home. It was all nothing to her, less than a dream, this place she lived in. Charlotte's engrossment in her new life, her eagerness to please her master, was a contemptible weakness to this embittered heart. She would laugh when she found her elder sister trying to arrange her homely gowns in the French taste, and stalk silently through the large school-

rooms with a fierce satisfaction in her own ugly sleeves, in the Haworth cut of her skirts. She seldom spoke a word to any one; only sometimes she would argue with Monsieur Héger, perhaps secretly glad to have the chance of shocking Charlotte. If they went out to tea, she would sit still on her chair, answering "Yes" and "No;" inert, miserable, with a heart full of tears. When her work was done she would walk in the Cross-bowmen's ancient garden, under the trees, leaning on her shorter sister's arm, pale, silent—a tall, stooping figure. Often she said nothing at all. Charlotte, also, was very profitably speechless; under her eyes 'Villette' was taking shape. But Emily did not think of Brussels. She was dreaming of Haworth.

One poem that she wrote at this time may appropriately be quoted here. It was, Charlotte tells us, "composed at twilight, in the schoolroom, when the leisure of the evening play-hour brought back, in full tide, the thoughts of home:"

"A little while, a little while,
The weary task is put away,
And I can sing and I can smile
Alike, while I have holiday.

"Where wilt thou go, my harassed heart—
What thought, what scene invites thee now?
What spot, or near or far apart,
Has rest for thee, my weary brow?

"There is a spot mid barren hills,
Where winter howls and driving rain;
But, if the dreary tempest chills,
There is a light that warms again.

"The house is old, the trees are bare,
Moonless above bends twilight's dome;
But what on earth is half so dear—
So longed for—as the hearth of home?

"The mute bird sitting on the stone,
The dark moss dripping from the wall,
The thorn-tree gaunt, the walks o'ergrown,
I love them; how I love them all!

"And, as I mused, the naked room,
The alien fire-light died away;
And from the midst of cheerless gloom
I passed to bright, unclouded day.

"A little and a lone green lane,
That opened on a common wide;
A distant, dreary, dim, blue chain
Of mountains circling every side:

"A heaven so dear, an earth so calm,
So sweet, so soft, so hushed an air;
And—deepening still the dream-like charm—
Wild moor-sheep feeding everywhere.

"*That* was the scene, I knew it well;
I knew the turfy pathway's sweep,
That, winding o'er each billowy swell,
Marked out the tracks of wandering sheep.

"Could I have lingered but an hour,
It well had paid a week of toil;
But truth has banished fancy's power,
Restraint and heavy task recoil.

"Even as I stood with raptured eye,
Absorbed in bliss so deep and dear,
My hour of rest had fleeted by,
And back came labour, bondage, care."

Charlotte meanwhile writes in good, even in high spirits to her friend: "I think I am never unhappy, my present life is so delightful, so congenial, compared to that of a governess. My time, constantly occupied, passes too rapidly. Hitherto both Emily and I have had good health, and therefore we have been able to work well. There is one individual of whom I have not

yet spoken—Monsieur Héger, the husband of Madame. He is professor of rhetoric—a man of power as to mind, but very choleric and irritable as to temperament—a little, black, ugly being, with a face that varies in expression; sometimes he borrows the lineaments of an insane tom cat, sometimes those of a delirious hyena, occasionally—but very seldom—he discards these perilous attractions and assumes an air not a hundred times removed from what you would call mild and gentlemanlike. He is very angry with me just at present, because I have written a translation which he chose to stigmatise as 'peu correct.' He did not tell me so, but wrote the words on the margin of my book, and asked, in brief, stern phrase, how it happened that my compositions were always better than my translations? adding that the thing seemed to him inexplicable."

The reader will already have recognised in the black, ugly, choleric little professor of rhetoric, the one absolutely natural hero of a woman's novel, the beloved and whimsical figure of the immortal Monsieur Paul Emanuel.

"He and Emily," adds Charlotte, "don't draw well together at all. Emily works like a horse, and she has had great difficulties to contend with, far greater than I have had."

Emily did indeed work hard. She was there to work, and not till she had learned a certain amount would her conscience permit her to return to Haworth. It was for dear liberty that she worked. She began German, a favourite study in after years, and of some purpose, since the style of Hofmann left its impression on the author of 'Wuthering Heights.' She worked hard at music; and in half a year the stumbling schoolgirl became a brilliant and proficient musician. Her playing is said to have been singularly accurate, vivid, and full of fire. French

too, both in grammar and in literature, was a constant study.

Monsieur Héger recognised the fact that in dealing with the Brontës he had not to make the customary allowances for a schoolgirl's undeveloped inexperience. These were women of mature and remarkable intelligence. The method he adopted in teaching them was rather that of a University professor than such as usually is used in a pensionnat. He would choose some masterpiece of French style, some passage of eloquence or portraiture, read it to them with a brief lecture on its distinctive qualities, pointing out what was exaggerated, what apt, what false, what subtle in the author's conception or his mode of expressing it. They were then dismissed to make a similar composition, without the aid of grammar or dictionary, availing themselves as far as possible of the *nuances* of style and the peculiarities of method of the writer chosen as the model of the hour. In this way the girls became intimately acquainted with the literary *technique* of the best French masters. To Charlotte the lessons were of incalculable value, perfecting in her that clear and accurate style which makes her best work never wearisome, never old-fashioned. But the very thought of imitating any one, especially of imitating any French writer, was repulsive to Emily, "rustic all through, moorish, wild and knotty as a root of heath."* When Monsieur Héger had explained his plan to them, "Emily spoke first; and said that she saw no good to be derived from it; and that by adopting it they would lose all originality of thought and expression. She would have entered into an argument on the subject, but for this Monsieur Héger had no time. Charlotte then spoke; she also doubted the success of the plan; but

* C. Brontë.

she would follow out Monsieur Héger's advice, because she was bound to obey him while she was his pupil."* Charlotte soon found a keen enjoyment in this species of literary composition, yet Emily's *devoir* was the best. They are, alas, no longer to be seen, no longer in the keeping of so courteous and proud a guardian as Mrs. Gaskell had to deal with; but she and Monsieur Héger both have expressed their opinions that in genius, imagination, power and force of language, Emily was the superior of the two sisters.

So great was the personality of this energetic, silent, brooding, ill-dressed young Englishwoman, that all who knew her recognised in her the genius they were slow to perceive in her more sociable and vehement sister. Madame Héger, the worldly, cold-mannered, *surveillante* of Villette, avowed the singular force of a nature most antipathetic to her own. Yet Emily had no companions; the only person of whom we hear, in even the most negative terms of friendliness, is one of the teachers, a certain Mademoiselle Marie, "talented and original, but of repulsive and arbitrary manners, which have made the whole school, except Emily and myself, her bitter enemies." No less arbitrary and repulsive seemed poor Emily herself, a sprig of purple heath at discord with those bright, smooth geraniums and lobelias; Emily, of whom every surviving friend extols the never-failing, quiet unselfishness, the genial spirit ready to help, the timid but faithful affection. She was so completely *hors de son assiette* that even her virtues were misplaced.

There was always one thing she could do, one thing as natural as breath to Emily—determined labour. In that merciful engrossment she could forget her heart-

* Mrs. Gaskell.

sick weariness and the jarring strangeness of things; every lesson conquered was another step taken on the long road home. And the days allowed ample space for work, although it was supported upon a somewhat slender diet.

Counting boarders and externes, Madame Héger's school numbered over a hundred pupils. These were divided into three classes; the second, in which the Brontës were, containing sixty students. In the last row, side by side, absorbed and quiet, sat Emily and Charlotte. Soon after rising, the pensionnaires were given their light Belgian breakfast of coffee and rolls. Then from nine to twelve they studied. Three mistresses and seven professors were engaged to take the different classes. At twelve a lunch of bread and fruit; then a turn in the green alley, Charlotte and Emily always walking together. From one till two fancy-work; from two till four, lessons again. Then dinner: the one solid meal of the day. From five till six the hour was free, Emily's musing-hour. From six till seven the terrible *lecture pieuse*, hateful to the Brontës' Protestant spirit. At eight a supper of rolls and water; then prayers, and to bed.

The room they slept in was a long school-dormitory. After all they could not get the luxury, so much desired, of a separate room. But their two beds were alone together at the further end, veiled in white curtains; discreet and retired as themselves. Here, after the day's hard work, they slept. In sleep, one is no longer an exile.

But often Emily did not sleep. The old well-known pain, wakefulness, longing, was again beginning to relax her very heartstrings. "The same suffering and conflict ensued, heightened by the strong recoil of her upright

heretic and English spirit from the gentle Jesuitry of the foreign and Romish system. Once more she seemed sinking, but this time she rallied through the mere force of resolution: with inward remorse and shame she looked back on her former failure, and resolved to conquer, but the victory cost her dear. She was never happy till she carried her hard-won knowledge back to the remote English village, the old parsonage house and desolate Yorkshire hills." *

But not yet, not yet, this happiness! The opportunity that had been so hardly won must not be thrown away before the utmost had been made of it. And she was not utterly alone. Charlotte was there. The success that she had in her work must have helped a little to make her foreign home tolerable to her. Soon she knew enough of music to give lessons to the younger pupils. Then German, costing her and Charlotte an extra ten francs the month, as also much severe study and struggle. Charlotte writes in the summer: "Emily is making rapid progress in French, German, music and drawing. Monsieur and Madame Héger begin to recognise the valuable parts of her character under her singularities."

It was doubtful, even, whether they would come home in September. Madame Héger made a proposal to her two English pupils for them to stay on, without paying, but without salary, for half a year. She would dismiss her English teacher, whose place Charlotte would take. Emily was to teach music to the younger pupils. The proposal was kind and would be of advantage to the sisters.

Charlotte declared herself inclined to accept it. "I have been happy in Brussels," she averred. And Emily, though she, indeed, was not happy, acknowledged the

* C. Brontë. Memoir of her sisters.

benefit to be derived from a longer term of study. Six months, after all, was rather short to gain a thorough knowledge of French, with Italian and German, when you add to these acquirements music and drawing, which Emily worked at with a will. Besides, she could not fail again, could not go back to Haworth leaving Charlotte behind; neither could she spoil Charlotte's future by persuading her to reject Madame Héger's terms. So both sisters agreed to stay in Brussels. They were not utterly friendless there; two Miss Taylors, schoolfellows and dear friends of Charlotte's, were at school at the Château de Kokleberg, just outside the barriers. Readers of 'Shirley' know them as Rose and Jessie Yorke. The Brontës met them often, nearly every week, at some cousins of the Taylors, who lived in the town. But this diversion, pleasant to Charlotte, was merely an added annoyance to Emily. She would sit stiff and silent, unable to say a word, longing to be somewhere at her ease. Mrs. Jenkins, too, had begun with asking them to spend their Sundays with her; but Emily never said a word, and Charlotte, though sometimes she got excited and spoke well and vehemently, never ventured on an opinion till she had gradually wheeled round in her chair with her back to the person she addressed. They were so shy, so rustic, Mrs. Jenkins gave over inviting them, feeling that they did not like to refuse, and found it no pleasure to come. Charlotte, indeed, still had the Taylors, their cousins, and the family of a doctor living in the town, whose daughter was a pupil and friend of hers. Charlotte, too, had Madame Héger and her admired professor of rhetoric; but Emily had no friend except her sister.

Nevertheless it was settled they should stay. The *grandes vacances* began on the 15th of August, and,

as the journey to Yorkshire cost so much, and as they were anxious to work, the Brontë girls spent their holidays in Rue d'Isabelle. Besides themselves only six or eight boarders remained. All their friends were away holiday-making; but they worked hard, preparing their lessons for the masters who, holidayless as they, had stayed behind in white, dusty, blazing, airless Brussels, to give lectures to the scanty class at Madame Héger's pensionnat.

So the dreary six weeks passed away. In October the term began again, the pupils came back, new pupils were admitted, Monsieur Héger was more gesticulatory, vehement, commanding than usual, and Madame, in her quiet way, was no less occupied. Life and youth filled the empty rooms. The Brontë girls, sad enough indeed, for their friend Martha Taylor had died suddenly at the Château de Kokleberg, were, notwithstanding, able to feel themselves in a more natural position for women of their age. Charlotte, henceforth, by Monsieur Héger's orders, "Mademoiselle Charlotte," was the new English teacher; Emily the assistant music-mistress. But, in the middle of October, in the first flush of their employment, came a sudden recall to Haworth. Miss Branwell was very ill. Immediately the two girls, who owed so much to her, who, but for her bounty, could never have been so far away in time of need, decided to go home. They broke their determination to Monsieur and Madame Héger, who, sufficiently generous to place the girls' duty before their own convenience, upheld them in their course. They hastily packed up their things, took places *viâ* Antwerp to London, and prepared to start. At the last moment, the trunks packed, in the early morning the postman came. He brought another letter from Haworth. Their aunt was dead.

So much the greater need that they should hasten home. Their father, left without his companion of twenty years, to keep his house, to read to him at night, to discuss with him on equal terms, their father would be lonely and distressed. Henceforth one of his daughters must stay with him. Anne was in an excellent situation; must they ask her to give it up? And what now of the school, the school at Burlington? There was much to take counsel over and consider; they must hurry home. So, knowing the worst, their future hanging out of shape and loose before their eyes, they set out on their dreary journey knowing not whether or when they might return.

CHAPTER VIII.

A RETROSPECT.

"POOR, brilliant, gay, moody, moping, wildly excitable, miserable Brontë! No history records your many struggles after the good—your wit, brilliance, attractiveness, eagerness for excitement—all the qualities which made you such 'good company' and dragged you down to an untimely grave."

Thus ejaculates Mr. Francis H. Grundy, remembering the boon-companion of his early years, the half-insane, pitiful creature that opium and brandy had made of clever Branwell at twenty-two. Returned from Bradford, his nervous system racked by opium fumes, he had loitered about at Haworth until his father, stubborn as he was, perceived the obvious fact that every idle day led his only son more hopelessly down to the pit of ruin. At last he exerted his influence to find some work for Branwell, and obtained for his reckless, fanciful, morbid lad the post of station-master at a small roadside place, Luddendenfoot by name, on the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway. Thither he went some months before Charlotte and Emily left for Brussels. It was there Mr. Grundy met him; a novel station-master.

"Had a position been chosen for this strange creature for the express purpose of driving him several steps to the bad, this must have been it. The line was only just opened. The station was a rude wooden hut, and there

was no village near at hand. Alone in the wilds of Yorkshire, with few books, little to do, no prospects, and wretched pay, with no society congenial to his better taste, but plenty of wild, rollicking, hard-headed, half-educated manufacturers, who would welcome him to their houses, and drink with him as often as he chose to come, what was this morbid man, who couldn't bear to be alone, to do?" *

What Branwell always did, in fine, was that which was easiest to him to do. He drank himself violent, when he did not drink himself maudlin. He left the porter at the station to keep the books, and would go off for days "on the drink" with his friends and fellow-carousers. About this time Mr. Grundy, then an engineer at Halifax, fell in with the poor, half-demented, lonely creature, and for a while things went a little better.

Drink and riot had not embellished the tawny-maned, laughing, handsome darling of Haworth. Here is his portrait as at this time he appeared to his friend:

"He was insignificantly small—one of his life's trials. He had a mass of red hair, which he wore brushed high off his forehead—to help his height, I fancy—a great, bumpy, intellectual forehead, nearly half the size of the whole facial contour; small ferrety eyes, deep-sunk and still further hidden by the never-removed spectacles; prominent nose, but weak lower features. He had a downcast look, which never varied, save for a rapid momentary glance at long intervals. Small and thin of person, he was the reverse of attractive at first sight."

Yet this insignificant, sunken-eyed slip of humanity had a spell for those who heard him speak. There was no subject, moral, intellectual, or philosophic too remote or too profound for him to measure it at a moment's

* 'Pictures of the Past.' F. H. Grundy.

notice, with the ever-ready, fallacious plumb-line of his brilliant vanity. He would talk for hours: be eloquent, convincing, almost noble; and afterwards accompany his audience to the nearest public-house.

"At times we would drive over in a gig to Haworth (twelve miles) and visit his people. He was there at his best, and would be eloquent and amusing, although sometimes he would burst into tears when returning, and swear that he meant to amend. I believe, however, that he was half mad and could not control himself." *

So must his friends in kindness think. Mad; if haunting, morbid dreads and fancies conjured up by poisonous drugs and never to be laid; if a will laid prostrate under the yoke of unclean habits; if a constitution prone to nervous derangement and blighted by early excess; if such things forcing him by imperceptible daily pressure to choose the things he loathed, to be the thing he feared, to act a part abhorrent to his soul; if such estranging and falsification of a man's true self may count as lunacy, the luckless, worthless boy was mad.

It must have galled him, going home, to be welcomed so kindly, hoped so much from, by those who had forgiven amply, and did not dream how heavy a mortgage had since been laid upon their pardon; to have talked to the prim, pretty old lady who denied herself every day to save an inheritance for him; to watch pious, gentle Anne into whose dreams the sins she prayed against had never entered; worst of all, the sight of his respectable, well-preserved father, honoured by all the parish, successful, placed by his own stern, continued, will high beyond the onslaughts of temptation, yet with a temperament singularly akin to that morbid, passionate son's.

* 'Pictures of the Past.'

So he would weep going home; weep for his falling off, and perhaps more sincerely for the short life of his contrition. Then the long evenings alone with his thoughts in that lonely place would make him afraid of repentance, afraid of God, himself, night, all. He would drink.

He had fits of as contrary pride. "He was proud of his name, his strength and his abilities." Proud of his name! He wrote a poem on it, "Brontë," an eulogy of Nelson, which won the patronising approbation of Leigh Hunt, Miss Martineau and others, to whom, at his special request, it was submitted. Had he ever heard of his dozen aunts and uncles, the Pruntys of Ahaderg? Or if not, with what sensations must the Vicar of Haworth have listened to this blazoning forth and triumphing over the glories of his ancient name?

Branwell had fits of passion, too, the repetition of his father's vagaries. "I have seen him drive his doubled fist through the panels of a door—it seemed to soothe him." The rough side of his nature got full play, and perhaps won him some respect denied to his cleverness, in the society amongst which he was chiefly thrown. For a little time the companionship of Mr. Grundy served to rescue him from utter abandonment to license. But, in the midst of this improvement, the crash came. As he had sown, he reaped.

Those long absences, drinking at the houses of his friends, had been turned to account by the one other inhabitant of the station at Luddendenfoot. The luggage porter was left to keep the books, and, following his master's example, he sought his own enjoyment before his employers' gain. He must have made a pretty penny out of those escapades of Barnwell's, for some months after the Vicar of Haworth had obtained

his son's appointment, when the books received their customary examination, serious defalcations were discovered. An inquiry was instituted, which brought to light Branwell's peculiar method of managing the station. The lad himself was not suspected of actual theft; but so continued, so glaring had been his negligence, so hopeless the cause, that he was summarily dismissed the company's service, and sent home in dire disgrace to Haworth.

He came home not only in disgrace, but ill. Never strong, his constitution was deranged and broken by his excesses; yet, strangly enough, consumption, which carried off so prematurely the more highly-gifted, the more strongly-principled daughters of the house, consumption, which might have been originally produced by the vicious life this youth had led, laid no claim upon him. His mother's character and her disease descended to her daughters only. Branwell inherited his father's violent temper, strong passions and nervous weakness without the strength of will and moral fibre that made his father remarkable. Probably this brilliant, weak, shallow, selfish lad reproduced accurately enough the characteristics of some former Prunty; for Patrick Branwell was as distinctly an Irishman as if his childhood had been spent in his grandfather's cabin at Ahaderg.

He came home to find his sisters all away. Anne in her situation as governess. Emily and Charlotte in Rue d'Isabelle. No one, therefore, to be a check upon his habits, save the neat old lady, growing weaker day by day, who spent nearly all her time in her bedroom to avoid the paven floors of the basement; and the father, who did not care for company, took his meals alone for fear of indigestion, and found it necessary to spend the succeeding time in perfect quiet. The greater

part of the day was, therefore, at Branwell's uncontrolled, unsupervised disposal.

To do him justice, he does seem to have made so much effort after a new place of work as was involved in writing letters to his friend Grundy, and probably to others, suing for employment. But his offence had been too glaring to be condoned. Mr. Grundy seems to have advised the hapless young man to take shelter in the Church, where the influence of his father and his mother's relatives might help him along; but, as Branwell said, he had not a single qualification, "save, perhaps hypocrisy." Parson's sons rarely have a great idea of the Church. The energy, self-denial, and endurance which a clergyman ought to possess were certainly not in Branwell's line. Besides, how could he take his degree? Montgomery, it seems, recommended him to make trial of literature. "All very well, but I have little conceit of myself and great desire for activity. You say that you write with feelings similar to those with which you last left me; keep them no longer. I trust I am somewhat changed, or I should not be worth a thought; and though nothing could ever give me your buoyant spirits and an outward man corresponding therewith, I may, in dress and appearance, emulate something like ordinary decency. And now, wherever coming years may lead—Greenland's snows or sands of Afric—I trust, etc. 9th June, 1842." *

It is doubtful, judging from Branwell's letters and his verses, whether anything much better than his father's 'Cottage in the Wood' would have resulted from his following the advice of James Montgomery. Fluent ease, often on the verge of twaddle, with here and there a bright, felicitous touch, with here and there a smack

* 'Pictures of the Past.'

of the conventional hymn-book and pulpit twang—such weak and characterless effusions are all that is left of the passion-ridden pseudo-genius of Haworth. Real genius is perhaps seldom of such showy temperament.

Poor Branwell! it needed greater strength than his to retrieve that first false step into ruin. He cannot help himself, and can find no one to help him; he appeals again to Mr. Grundy (in a letter which must, from internal evidence, have been written about this time, although a different and impossible year is printed at its heading):—

"DEAR SIR,

"I cannot avoid the temptation to cheer my spirits by scribbling a few lines to you while I sit here alone, all the household being at church—the sole occupant of an ancient parsonage among lonely hills, which probably will never hear the whistle of an engine till I am in my grave.

"After experiencing, since my return home, extreme pain and illness, with mental depression worse than either, I have at length acquired health and strength and soundness of mind, far superior, I trust, to anything shown by that miserable wreck you used to know under my name. I can now speak cheerfully and enjoy the company of another without the stimulus of six glasses of whisky. I can write, think and act with some apparent approach to resolution, and I only want a motive for exertion to be happier than I have been for years. But I feel my recovery from *almost insanity* to be retarded by having nothing to listen to except the wind moaning among old chimneys and older ash-trees —nothing to look at except heathery hills, walked over when life had all to hope for and nothing to regret with

me—no one to speak to except crabbed old Greeks and Romans who have been dust the last five [*sic*] thousand years. And yet this quiet life, from its contrast, makes the year passed at Luddendenfoot appear like a nightmare, for I would rather give my hand than undergo again the grovelling carelessness, the malignant, yet cold debauchery, the determination to find out how far mind could carry body without both being chucked into hell, which too often marked my conduct when there, lost as I was to all I really liked, and seeking relief in the indulgence of feelings which form the blackest spot in my character.

"Yet I have something still left me which may do me service. But I ought not to remain too long in solitude, for the world soon forgets those who have bidden it 'good-bye.' Quiet is an excellent cure, but no medicine should be continued after a patient's recovery, so I am about, though ashamed of the business, to dun you for answers to ——.

"Excuse the trouble I am giving to one on whose kindness I have no claim, and for whose services I am offering no return except gratitude and thankfulness, which are already due to you. Give my sincere regards to Mr. Stephenson. A word or two to show you have not altogether forgotten me will greatly please,

"Yours, etc."

Alas, no helping hand rescued the sinking wretch from the quicksands of idle sensuality which slowly engulfed him! Yet, at this time, there might have been hope, had he been kept from evil. Deliver himself he could not. His "great desire for activity" seems to have had to be in abeyance for some months, for on the 25th of October he is still at Haworth. He then writes to

Mr. Grundy again. The letter brings us up to the time when—in the cheerless morning—Charlotte and Emily set out on their journey homewards; it reveals to us how much real undeserved suffering must have been going on side by side with Branwell's purposeless miseries in the grey old parsonage at Haworth. The good methodical old maiden aunt—who for twenty years had given the best of her heart to this gay affectionate nephew of hers—had come down to the edge of the grave, having waited long enough to see the hopeless fallacy of all her dreams for him, all her affection. Branwell, who was really tender-hearted, must have been sobered then.

He writes to Mr. Grundy in a sincere and manly strain:—

"MY DEAR SIR,

"There is no misunderstanding. I have had a long attendance at the death-bed of the Rev. Mr. Weightman, one of my dearest friends, and now I am attending at the death-bed of my Aunt, who has been for twenty years as my mother. I expect her to die in a few hours.

"As my sisters are far from home, I have had much on my mind, and these things must serve as an apology for what was never intended as neglect of your friendship to us.

"I had meant not only to have written to you, but to the Rev. James Martineau, gratefully and sincerely acknowledging the receipt of his most kindly and truthful criticism—at least in advice, though too generous far in praise—but one sad ceremony must, I fear, be gone through first. Give my most sincere respects to Mr. Stephenson, and excuse this scrawl; my eyes are too

dim with sorrow to see well. Believe me, your not very happy, but obliged friend and servant,

"P. B. BRONTË."

But not till three days later the end came. By that time Anne was home to tend the woman who had taken her, a little child, into her love and always kept her there. Anne had ever lived gladly with Miss Branwell; her more dejected spirit did not resent the occasional oppressions, the little tyrannies, which revolted Charlotte and silenced Emily. And, at the last, all the constant self-sacrifice of those twenty years, spent for their sake in a strange and hated country, would shine out, and yet more endear the sufferer to those who had to lose her.

On the 29th of October Branwell again writes to his friend:—

"MY DEAR SIR,

"As I don't want to lose a *real* friend, I write in deprecation of the tone of your letter. Death only has made me neglectful of your kindness, and I have lately had so much experience with him, that your sister would *not now* blame me for indulging in gloomy visions either of this world or of another. I am incoherent, I fear, but I have been waking two nights witnessing such agonising suffering as I would not wish my worst enemy to endure; and I have now lost the pride and director of all the happy days connected with my childhood. I have suffered such sorrow since I last saw you at Haworth, that I do not now care if I were fighting in India, or —— since, when the mind is depressed, danger is the most effectual cure."

Miss Branwell was dead. All was over: she was buried on a Tuesday morning, before Charlotte and

Emily, having travelled night and day, got home. They found Mr. Brontë and Anne sitting together, quietly mourning the customary presence to be known no more. Branwell was not there. It was the first time he would see his sisters since his great disgrace; he could not wait at home to welcome them.

Miss Branwell's will had to be made known. The little property that she had saved out of her frugal income was all left to her three nieces. Branwell had been her darling, the only son, called by her name; but his disgrace had wounded her too deeply. He was not even mentioned in her will.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RECALL.

SUDDENLY recalled from what had seemed the line of duty, with all their future prospects broken, the three sisters found themselves again at Haworth together. There could be no question now of their keeping a school at Burlington; if at all, it must be at Haworth, where their father could live with them. Miss Branwell's legacies would amply provide for the necessary alterations in the house; the question before them was whether they should immediately begin these alterations, or first of all secure a higher education to themselves.

At all events one must stay at home to keep house for Mr. Brontë. Emily quickly volunteered to be the one. Her offer was welcome to all; she was the most experienced housekeeper. Anne had a comfortable situation, which she might resume at the end of the Christmas holidays, and Charlotte was anxious to get back to Brussels.

It would certainly be of advantage to their school, that cherished dream now so likely to come true, that the girls should be able to teach German, and that one of them at least should speak French with fluency and well. Monsieur Héger wrote to Mr. Brontë when Charlotte and Emily left, pointing out how much more stable and enduring their advantages would become, could they

continue for another year at Brussels. "In a year," he says, "each of your daughters would be completely provided against the future; each of them was acquiring at the same time instruction and the science to instruct. Mademoiselle Emily has been learning the piano, receiving lessons from the best master that we have in Brussels, and already she had little pupils of her own; she was therefore losing at the same time a remainder of ignorance, and one, more embarrassing still, of timidity. Mademoiselle Charlotte was beginning to give lessons in French, and was acquiring that assurance and *aplomb* so necessary to a teacher. One year more, at the most, and the work had been completed, and completed well."

Emily, as we know, refused the lure. Once at Haworth, she was not to be induced, by offer of any advantages, to quit her native heath. On the other hand, Charlotte desired nothing better. Hers was a nature very capable of affection, of gratitude, of sentiment. It would have been a sore wrench to her to break so suddenly with her busy, quiet life in the old mansion, Rue d'Isabelle. Almost imperceptibly she had become fast friends with the place. Mary Taylor had left, it is true, and bright, engaging Martha slept there, too sound to hear her, in the Protestant cemetery. But in foreign, heretic, distant Brussels there were calling memories for the downright, plain little Yorkshire woman. She could not choose but hear. The blackavised, tender-hearted, fiery professor, for whom she felt the reverent, eager friendship that intellectual girls often give to a man much older than they; the doctor's family; even Madame Beck; even the Belgian schoolgirls—she should like to see them all again. She did not perhaps realise how different a place Brussels would seem without her sister. And it would certainly be an advantage for the school that she should

know German. For these, and many reasons, Charlotte decided to renounce a salary of £50 a year offered her in England, and to accept that of £16 which she would earn in Brussels.

Thus it was determined that at the end of the Christmas holidays the three sisters were again to be divided. But first they were nearly three months together.

Branwell was at home. Even yet at Haworth that was a pleasure and not a burden. His sisters never saw him at his worst; his vehement repentance brought conviction to their hearts. They still hoped for his future, still said to each other that men were different from women, and that such strong passions betokened a nature which, if once directed right, would be passionately right. They did not feel the miserable flabbiness of his moral fibre; did not know that the weak slip down when they try to stand, and cannot march erect. They were both too tender and too harsh with their brother, because they could not recognise what a mere, poor creature was this erring genius of theirs.

Thus, when the first shock was over, the reunited family was most contented. Lightly, naturally, as an autumn leaf, the old aunt had fallen out of the household, her long duties over; and they—though they loved and mourned her—they were freer for her departure. There was no restraint now on their actions, their opinions; they were mistresses in their own home. It was a happy Christmas, though not free from burden. The sisters, parted for so long, had much experience to exchange, many plans to make. They had to revisit their old haunts on the moors, white now with snow. There were walks to the library at Keighley for such books as had been added during their absence. Ellen came to Haworth. Then, at the end of January 1843,

Anne went back to her duties, and Charlotte set off alone for Brussels.

Emily was left behind with Branwell; but not for long. It must have been about this time that the ill-fated young man obtained a place as tutor in the house where Anne was governess. It appeared a most fortunate connection; the family was well known for its respectable position, came of a stock eminent in good works, and the sisters might well believe that, under Anne's gentle influence and such favouring auspices, their brother would be led into the way of the just.

Then Emily was alone in the grey house, save for her secluded father and old Tabby, now over seventy. She was not unhappy. No life could be freer than her own; it was she that disposed, she too that performed most of the household work. She always got up first in the morning and did the roughest part of the day's labour before frail old Tabby came down; since kindness and thought for others were part of the nature of this unsocial, rugged woman. She did the household ironing and most of the cookery. She made the bread; and her bread was famous in Haworth for its lightness and excellence. As she kneaded the dough, she would glance now and then at an open book propped up before her. It was her German lesson. But not always did she study out of books; those who worked with her in that kitchen, young girls called in to help in stress of business, remember how she would keep a scrap of paper, a pencil, at her side, and how, when the moment came that she could pause in her cooking or her ironing, she would jot down some impatient thought and then resume her work. With these girls she was always friendly and hearty—"pleasant, sometimes quite jovial like a boy," "so genial and kind, a little masculine," say my informants; but of strangers

she was exceedingly timid, and if the butcher's boy or the baker's man came to the kitchen door she would be off like a bird into the hall or the parlour till she heard their hob-nails clumping down the path. No easy getting sight of that rare bird. Therefore, it may be, the Haworth people thought more of her powers than of those of Anne or Charlotte, who might be seen at school any Sunday. They say: "A deal o' folk thout her th' clever'st o' them a', hasumiver shoo wur so timid, shoo cudn't frame to let it aat."

For amusements she had her pets and the garden. She always fed the animals herself: the old cat; Flossy, Anne's favourite spaniel; Keeper, the fierce bulldog, her own constant, dear companion, whose portrait, drawn by her spirited hand, is still extant. And the creatures on the moor were all, in a sense, her pets and familiar with her. The intense devotion of this silent woman to all manner of dumb creatures has something pathetic, inexplicable, almost deranged. "She never showed regard to any human creature; all her love was reserved for animals," said some shallow jumper at conclusions to Mrs. Gaskell. Regard and help and staunch friendliness to all in need was ever characteristic of Emily Brontë; yet between her nature and that of the fierce, loving, faithful Keeper, that of the wild moor-fowl, of robins that die in confinement, of quick-running hares, of cloud-sweeping, tempest-boding sea-mews, there was a natural likeness.

The silent-growing flowers were also her friends. The little garden, open to all the winds that course over Lees Moor and Stillingworth Moor to the blowy summit of Haworth Street—that little garden whose only bulwark against the storm was the gravestones outside the railing, the stunted thorns and currant-bushes within—was

nevertheless the home of many sweet and hardy flowers, creeping up under the house and close to the shelter of the bushes. So the days went swiftly enough in tending her house, her garden, her dumb creatures. In the evenings she would sit on the hearthrug in the lonely parlour, one arm thrown round Keeper's tawny neck, studying a book. For it was necessary to study. After the next Christmas holidays the sisters hoped to reduce to practice their long-cherished vision of keeping school together. Letters from Brussels showed Emily that Charlotte was troubled, excited, full of vague disquiet. She would be glad, then, to be home, to use the instrument it had cost so much pains to perfect. A costly instrument, indeed, wrought with love, anguish, lonely fears, vanquished passion; but in that time no one guessed that, not the school-teacher's German, not the fluent French acquired abroad, was the real result of this terrible firing, but a novel to be called 'Villette.'

Emily then, "Mine bonnie love," as Charlotte used to call her, cannot have been quite certain of this dear sister's happiness; and as time went on Anne's letters, too, began to give disquieting tidings. Not that her health was breaking down; it was, as usual, Branwell whose conduct distressed his sisters. He had altered so strangely; one day in the wildest spirits, the next moping in despair, giving himself mysterious airs of importance, expressing himself more than satisfied with his situation, smiling oddly, then, perhaps, the next moment all remorse and gloom. Anne could not understand what ailed him, but feared some evil.

At home, moreover, troubles slowly increased. Old Tabby grew very ill and could do no work; the girl Hannah left; Emily had all the business of investing the little property belonging to the three sisters since

Miss Branwell's death; worse still, old Mr. Brontë's health began to flag, his sight to fail. Worst of all—in that darkness, despair, loneliness—the old man, so Emily feared, acquired the habit of drinking, though not to excess, yet more than his abstemious past allowed. Doubtless she exaggerated her fears, with Branwell always present in her thoughts. But Emily grew afraid, alone at Haworth, responsible, knowing herself deficient in that controlling influence so characteristic of her elder sister. Her burden of doubt was more that she could bear. She decided to write to Charlotte.

On the 2nd of January, 1844, Charlotte arrived at Haworth.

On the 23rd of the month she wrote to her friend:—

"Everyone asks me what I am going to do now that I am returned home, and everyone seems to expect that I should immediately commence a school. In truth it is what I should wish to do. I desire it above all things, I have sufficient money for the undertaking, and I hope now sufficient qualifications to give me a fair chance of success; yet I cannot yet permit myself to enter upon life—to touch the object which seems now within my reach, and which I have been so long straining to attain. You will ask me why? It is on papa's account; he is now, as you know, getting old; and it grieves me to tell you that he is losing his sight. I have felt for some months that I ought not to be away from him, and I feel now that it would be too selfish to leave him (at least as long as Branwell and Anne are absent) in order to pursue selfish interests of my own. With the help of God, I will try to deny myself in this matter, and to wait.

"I suffered much before I left Brussels. I think, however long I live, I shall not forget what the parting

with Monsieur Héger cost me. It grieved me so much to grieve him who has been so true, kind, disinterested a friend. . . . . Haworth seems such a lonely quiet spot, buried away from the world. I no longer regard myself as young, indeed, I shall soon be twenty-eight; and it seems as if I ought to be working, and braving the rough realities of the world, as other people do——."*

Wait, eager Charlotte, there are in store for you enough and to spare of rude realities, enough of working and braving, in this secluded Haworth. No need to go forth in quest of dangers and trials. The air is growing thick with gloom round your mountain eyrie. High as it is, quiet, lonely, the storms of heaven and the storms of earth have found it out, to break there.

* Mrs. Gaskell.

CHAPTER X.

THE PROSPECTUSES.

GRADUALLY Charlotte's first depression wore away. Long discussions with Emily, as they took their walks over the moors, long silent brooding of ways and means, as they sat together in the parlour making shirts for Branwell, long thinking, brought new counsel. She went, moreover, to stay with her friend Ellen, and the change helped to restore her weakened health. She writes to her friend :—

"March 25.

"DEAR NELL,

"I got home safely and was not too much tired on arriving at Haworth. I feel rather better to-day than I have been, and in time I hope to regain more strength. I found Emily and papa well, and a letter from Branwell intimating that he and Anne are pretty well too. Emily is much obliged to you for the seeds you sent. She wishes to know if the Sicilian pea and the crimson cornflower are hardy flowers, or if they are delicate and should be sown in warm and sheltered situations. Write to me to-morrow and let me know how you all are, if your mother continues to get better. . . . .

"Good morning, dear Nell, I shall say no more to you at present.

"C. BRONTË."

"Monday morning.

"Our poor little cat has been ill two days and is just dead. It is piteous to see even an animal lying lifeless. Emily *is* sorry."

Side by side with all these lighter cares went on the schemes for the school. At last the two sisters determined to begin as soon as they saw a fair chance of getting pupils. They began the search in good earnest; but fortunately, postponed the necessary alterations in the house until they had the secure promise of, at any rate, three or four. Then their demands lessened as day by day that chance became more difficult and fainter. In early summer Charlotte writes: "As soon as I can get a chance of only *one* pupil, I will have cards of terms printed and will commence the repairs necessary in the house. I wish all to be done before the winter. I think of fixing the board and English education at £25 per annum."

Still no pupil was heard of, but the girls went courageously on, writing to every mother of daughters with whom they could claim acquaintance. But, alas, it was the case with one, that her children were already at school in Liverpool, with another that her child had just been promised to Miss C., with a third that she thought the undertaking praiseworthy, but Haworth was so very remote a spot. In vain did the girls explain that from some points of view the retired situation was an advantage; since, had they set up school in some fashionable place, they would have had house-rent to pay, and could not possibly have offered an excellent education for £25 a year. Parents are an expectant people. Still, every lady promised to recommend the school to mothers less squeamish, or less engaged; and, knowing how well they would show themselves worthy

of the chance, once they had obtained it, Charlotte and Emily took heart to hope.

The holidays arrived and still nothing was settled. Anne came home and helped in the laying of schemes and writing of letters—but, alas, Branwell also came home, irritable, extravagant, wildly gay, or gloomily moping. His sisters could no longer blind themselves to the fact that he drank, drank habitually, to excess. And Anne had fears—vague, terrible, foreboding—which she could not altogether make plain.

By this time they had raised the charge to £35, considering, perhaps, that their first offer had been so low as to discredit their attempt. But still they got no favourable answers. It was hard, for the girls had not been chary of time, money, or trouble to fit themselves for their occupation. Looking round they could count up many schoolmistresses far less thoroughly equipped. Only the Brontës had no interest.

Meanwhile Branwell amused himself as best he could. There was always the "Black Bull," with its admiring circle of drink-fellows, and the girls who admired Patrick's courteous bow and Patrick's winning smile. Good people all, who little dreamed how much vice, how much misery they were encouraging by their approbation. Mr. Grundy, too, came over now and then to see his old friend. "I knew them all," he says—"The father, upright, handsome, distantly courteous, white-haired, tall; knowing me as his son's friend, he would treat me in the Grandisonian fashion, coming himself down to the little inn to invite me, a boy, up to his house, where I would be coldly uncomfortable until I could escape with Patrick Branwell to the moors. The daughters—distant and distrait, large of nose, small of figure, red of hair (!), prominent of spectacles; showing great intellec-

tual development, but with eyes constantly cast down, very silent, painfully retiring. This was about the time of their first literary adventures, say 1843 or 1844." *

But of literary adventure there was at present little thought. The school still occupied their thoughts and dreams. At last, no pupil coming forward, some cards of terms were printed and given for distribution to the friends of Charlotte and Anne; Emily had no friends.

There are none left of them, those pitiful cards of terms never granted; records of such unfruitful hopes. They have fitly vanished, like the ghosts of children never born; and quicker still to vanish was the dream that called them forth. The weeks went on, and every week of seven letterless mornings, every week of seven anxious nights, made the sisters more fully aware that notice and employment would not come to them in the way they had dreamed; made them think it well that Branwell's home should not be the dwelling of innocent children.

Anne went back to her work leaving the future as uncertain as before.

In October Charlotte, always the spokeswoman, writes again to her friend and diligent helper in this matter:—

"DEAR NELL,

"I, Emily, and Anne are truly obliged to you for the efforts you have made in our behalf; and if you have not been successful you are only like ourselves. Everyone wishes us well; but there are no pupils to be had. We have no present intention, however, of breaking our hearts on the subject; still less of feeling mortified at our defeat. The effort must be beneficial, whatever the

* 'Pictures of the Past.'

result may be, because it teaches us experience and an additional knowledge of this world.

"I send you two additional circulars, and will send you two more, if you desire it, when I write again."

Those four circulars also came to nothing; it was now more than six months since the three sisters had begun their earnest search for pupils: more than three years since they had taken for the ruling aim of their endeavours the formation of this little school. Not one pupil could they secure; not one promise. At last they knew that they were beaten.

In November Charlotte writes again to Ellen:—

"We have made no alterations yet in our house. It would be folly to do so while there is so little likelihood of our ever getting pupils. I fear you are giving yourself too much trouble on our account.

"Depend on it, if you were to persuade a mama to bring her child to Haworth, the aspect of the place would frighten her, and she would probably take the dear girl back with her instanter. We are glad that we have made the attempt, and we will not be cast down because it has not succeeded." *

There was no more to be said, only to put carefully by, as one puts by the thoughts of an interrupted marriage, all the dreams that had filled so many months only to lay aside in a drawer, as one lays aside the long sewn at garments of a still-born child, the plans drawn out for the builder, the printed cards, the lists of books to get; only to face again a future of separate toil among strangers, to renounce the vision of a home together.

* Mrs. Gaskell.

CHAPTER XI.

BRANWELL'S FALL.

As the spring grew upon the moors, dappling them with fresh verdant shoots, clearing the sky overhead, loosening the winds to rush across them; as the beautiful season grew ripe in Haworth, every one of its days made clearer to the two anxious women waiting there in what shape their blurred foreboding would come true at last. They seldom spoke of Branwell now.

It was a hard and anxious time, ever expectant of an evil just at hand. Minor troubles, too, gathered round this shapeless boded grief: Mr. Brontë was growing blind; Charlotte, ever nervous, feared the same fate, and could do but little sewing with her weak, cherished eyesight. Anne's letters told of health worn out by constant, agonising suspicion. It was Emily, that strong bearer of burdens, on whom the largest share of work was laid.

Charlotte grew really weak as the summer came. Her sensitive, vehement nature felt anxiety as a physical pain. She was constantly with her father; her spirit sank with his, as month by month his sight grew sensibly weaker. The old man, to whom his own importance was so dear, suffered keenly, indeed, from the fear of actual blindness, and more from the horror of dependence, than from the dread of pain or privation. "He fears he will be nothing in the parish," says sorrowful

Charlotte. And as her father, never impatient, never peevish, became more deeply cast down and anxious, she, too, became nervous and fearful; she, too, dejected.

At last, when June came and brought no brightness to that grey old house, with the invisible shadow ever hovering above it, Charlotte was persuaded to seek rest and change in the home of her friend near Leeds.

Anne was home now; she had come back ill, miserable. She had suspicions that made her feel herself degraded, pure soul, concerning her brother's relation with her employer's wife. Many letters had passed between them, through her hands too. Too often had she heard her unthinking little pupils threaten their mother into more than customary indulgence, saying: "Unless you do as we wish, we shall tell papa about Mr. Brontë." The poor girl felt herself an involuntary accomplice to that treachery, that deceit.

To lie down at night under the roof, to break by day the bread of the good, sick, bedridden man, whose honour, she could not but fear, was in jeopardy from her own brother, such dire strain was too great for that frail, dejected nature. And yet to say openly to herself that Branwell had committed this disgrace—it was impossible. Rather must her suspicions be the morbid promptings of a diseased mind. She was wicked to have felt them. Poor, gentle Anne, sweet, "prim, little body," such scenes, such unhallowed vicinities of lust, were not for you. At last sickness came and set her free. She went home.

Home, with its constant labour, pure air of good works; home, with its sickness and love, its dread for others and noble sacrifice of self; how welcome was it to her wounded spirit! And yet this infinitely lighter

torment was wearing Charlotte out. They persuaded her to go away, and, when she had yielded, strove to keep her away.

Emily writes to Ellen in July:—

"DEAR MISS NUSSEY—If you have set your heart on Charlotte staying another week, she has our united consent. I, for one, will take everything easy on Sunday. I am glad she is enjoying herself; let her make the most of the next seven days to return stout and hearty. Love to her and you from Anne and myself, and tell her all are well at home.—Yours,

"EMILY BRONTE."

Charlotte stayed the extra week, benefiting largely thereby. She started for home, and enjoyed her journey, for she travelled with a French gentleman, and talked again with delight the sweet language which had left such lingering echoes in her memory, which forbade her to feel quite contented any more in her secluded Yorkshire home. Slight as it was, the little excitement did her good; feeling brave and ready to face and fight with a legion of shadows, she reached the gate of her own home, went in. Branwell was there.

He had been sent home a day or two before, apparently for a holiday. He must have known that some discovery had been made at last; he must have felt he never would return. Anne, too, must have had some misgivings; yet the worst was not known yet. Emily, at least, could not guess it. Not for long this truce with open disgrace. The very day of Charlotte's return a letter had come for Branwell from his employer. All had been found out. This letter commanded Branwell never to see again the mother of the children under his care, never set foot in her home, never write or speak to

her. Branwell, who loved her passionately, had in that moment no thought for the shame, the black disgrace, he had brought on his father's house. He stormed, raved, swore he could not live without her; cried out against her next for staying with her husband. Then prayed the sick man might die soon; they would yet be happy. Ah, he would never see her again!

A strange scene in the quiet parlour of a country vicarage, this anguish of guilty love, these revulsions from shameful ecstasy to shameful despair. Branwell raved on, delirious, agonised; and the blind father listened, sick at heart, maybe self-reproachful; and the gentle sister listened, shuddering, as if she saw hell lying open at her feet. Emily listened, too, indignant at the treachery, horrified at the shame; yet with an immense pity in her fierce and loving breast.

To this scene Charlotte entered.

Charlotte, with her vehement sense of right; Charlotte, with her sturdy indignation; when she, at last understood the whole guilty corrupted passion that had wrecked two homes, she turned away with something in her heart suddenly stiffened, dead. It was her passionate love for this shameful, erring brother, once as dear to her as her own soul. Yet she was very patient. She writes to a friend quietly and without too much disdain:—

"We have had sad work with Branwell. He thought of nothing but stunning or drowning his agony of mind" (in what fashion, the reader knows ere now) "no one in this house could have rest, and at last we have been obliged to send him from home for a week, with some one to look after him. He has written to me this morning, expressing some sense of contrition . . . . but as long as he remains at home, I scarce dare hope for peace

in the house. We must all, I fear, prepare for a season of distress and disquietude." *

A weary and a hopeless time. Branwell came back, better in body, but in nowise holier in mind. His one hope was that his enemy might die, die soon, and that things might be as they had been before. No thought of repentance. What money he had, he spent in gin or opium, anything to deaden recollection. A woman still lives at Haworth, who used to help in the housework at the "Black Bull." She still remembers how, in the early morning, pale, red-eyed, he would come into the passage of the inn, with his beautiful bow and sweep of the lifted hat, with his courteous smile and ready "Good morning, Anne!" Then he would turn to the bar, and feeling in his pockets for what small moneys he might have—sixpence, eightpence, tenpence, as the case might be—he would order so much gin and sit there drinking till it was all gone, then still sit there silent; or sometimes he would passionately speak of the woman he loved, of her beauty, sweetness, of how he longed to see her again; he loved to speak of her even to a dog; he would talk of her by the hour to his dog. Yet—lest we pity this real despair—let us glance at one of this man's letters. How could such vulgar weakness, such corrupt and loathsome sentimentality, such maudlin Micawber-penitence, yet feel so much! No easy task to judge of a misery too perverse for pity, too sincere for absolute contempt.

It is again to Mr. Grundy that he writes:—

"Since I last shook hands with you in Halifax, two summers ago, my life, till lately, has been one of apparent happiness and indulgence. You will ask—'Why does he complain then?' I can only reply by showing the undercurrent of distress which bore my bark to a whirl-

* Mrs. Gaskell.

pool, despite the surface-waves of life that seemed floating me to peace. In a letter begun in the spring of 1843" (*sic;* 1845 ?) "and never finished owing to incessant attacks of illness, I tried to tell you that I was tutor to the son of a wealthy gentleman whose wife is sister to the wife of ——, an M.P., and the cousin of Lord ——. This lady (though her husband detested me) showed me a degree of kindness which, when I was deeply grieved one day at her husband's conduct, ripened into declarations of more than ordinary feeling. My admiration of her mental and personal attractions, my knowledge of her unselfish sincerity, her sweet temper, and unwearied care for others, with but unrequited return where most should have been given . . . . although she is seventeen years my senior, all combined to an attachment on my part, and led to reciprocations which I had little looked for. Three months since I received a furious letter from my employer, threatening to shoot me if I returned from my vacation which I was passing at home; and letters from her lady's-maid and physician informed me of the outbreak, only checked by her firm courage and resolution that whatever harm came to her none should come to me. . . . . I have lain for nine long weeks, utterly shattered in body and broken down in mind. The probability of her becoming free to give me herself and estate never rose to drive away the prospect of her decline under her present grief. I dreaded, too, the wreck of my mind and body, which—God knows—during a short life have been most severely tried. Eleven continuous nights of sleepless horror reduced me to almost blindness, and being taken into Wales to recover, the sweet scenery, the sea, the sound of music caused me fits of unspeakable distress. You will say: 'What a fool!' But if you knew the many

causes that I have for sorrow, which I cannot even hint at here, you would perhaps pity as well as blame. At the kind request of Mr. Macaulay and Mr. Baines, I have striven to arouse my mind by writing something worthy of being read, but I really cannot do so. Of course you will despise the writer of all this. I can only answer that the writer does the same and would not wish to live, if he did not hope that work and change may yet restore him.

"Apologising sincerely for what seems like whining egotism, and hardly daring to hint about days when, in your company, I could sometimes sink the thoughts which 'remind me of departed days,' I fear 'departed never to return,' I remain, &c." *

Unhappy Branwell! some consolation he derives in his utmost sorrow from the fact that the lady of his love can employ her own lady's-maid and physician to write letters to her exiled lover. It is clear that his pride is gratified by this irregular association with a lord. He can afford to wait, stupefied with drink and drugs, till that happy time shall come when he can step forward and claim "herself and estate," henceforward Branwell Brontë, Esq., J.P., and a person of position in the county. Such paradisal future dawns above this present purgatory of pains and confusion.

That phrase concerning "herself and estate" is peculiarly apocalyptic. It sheds a quite new light upon a fact which, in Mrs. Gaskell's time, was regarded as a proof that some remains of conscience still stirred within this miserable fellow. Some months after his dismissal, towards the end of this unhappy year of 1845, he met this lady at Harrogate by appointment. It is said that she proposed a flight together, ready to forfeit all her

* 'Pictures of the Past.'

grandeur. It was Branwell who advised patience, and a little longer waiting. Maybe, though she herself was dear, "although seventeen years my senior," "herself and estate" was estimably dearer.

And yet he was in earnest, yet it was a question of life and death, of heaven or hell, with him. If he could not have her, he would have nothing. He would ruin himself and all he could. Most like, in this rage of vain despair, some passionate baby that shrieks, and hits, and tears, convulsed because it may not have the moon.

Small wonder that Charlotte's coldness, aggravated by continual outrage on Branwell's part, gradually became contempt and silence. In proportion as she had exulted in this brother, hoped all for him, did she now shrink from him, bitterly chill at heart.

"I begin to fear," she says, the once ambitious sister, "that he has rendered himself incapable of filling any respectable station in life." She cannot ask Ellen to come to see her, because he is in the house. "And while *he* is here, *you* shall not come. I am more confirmed in that resolution the more I see of him. I wish I could say one word to you in his favour, but I cannot. I will hold my tongue." *

For some while she hoped that the crisis would pass, and that then—no matter how humbly, the more obscurely the better—he would at least earn honest bread away from home. Such was not his intention. He professed to be too ill to leave Haworth; and ill, no doubt, he was from continual eating of opium, and daily drinking of drams. He stuck to his comfortable quarters, to the "Black Bull" just across the churchyard, heedless of what discomfort he gave to others. "Branwell offers no prospect of hope," says Charlotte, again. "How

* Mrs. Gaskell.

can we be more comfortable so long as Branwell stays at home and degenerates instead of improving? It has been intimated that he would be received again where he was formerly stationed if he would behave more steadily, but he refuses to make the effort. He will not work, and at home he is a drain on every resource, an impediment to all happiness. But there's no use in complaining——"

Small use indeed; yet once more she forced herself to make the hopeless effort, after some more than customary outbreak of the man who was drinking himself into madness and ruin. She writes in the March of 1846 to her friend and comforter, Ellen:—

"I went into the room where Branwell was, to speak to him, about an hour after I got home; it was very forced work to address him. I might have spared myself the trouble, as he took no notice, and made no reply; he was stupefied. My fears were not vain. I hear that he got a sovereign while I have been away, under pretence of paying a pressing debt; he went immediately and changed it at a public-house, and has employed it as was to be expected . . . . . concluded her account by saying that he was a 'hopeless being.' It is too true. In his present state it is scarcely possible to stay in the room where he is."*

It must be about that time that she for ever gave up expostulation or complaint in this matter. "I will hold my tongue," she had said, and she kept her word. For more than two years she held an utter silence to him; living under the same roof, witnessing day by day his ever-deepening degradation, no syllable crossed her lips to him. Since she could not (for the sake of those she loved and might comfort) refuse the loathsome daily

* Mrs. Gaskell.

touch and presence of sin, she endured it, but would have no fellowship therewith. She had no right over it, it none over her. She looked on speechless; that man was dead to her.

Anne, in whom the fibre of indignation was less strong, followed less sternly in her sister's wake.

"She had," says Charlotte in her 'Memoir,' "in the course of her life been called upon to contemplate, near at hand and for a long time, the terrible effects of talents misused and faculties abused; hers was naturally a sensitive, reserved and dejected nature; what she saw went very deeply into her mind; it did her harm."

The spectacle of this harm, coming undeserved to so dear, frail and innocent a creature, absorbed all Charlotte's pity. There was none left for Branwell.

But there was one woman's heart strong enough in its compassion to bear the daily disgusts, weaknesses, sins of Branwell's life, and yet persist in aid and affection. Night after night, when Mr. Brontë was in bed, when Anne and Charlotte had gone upstairs to their room, Emily still sat up, waiting. She often had very long to wait in the silent house before the staggering tread, the muttered oath, the fumbling hand at the door, bade her rouse herself from her sad thoughts and rise to let in the prodigal, and lead him in safety to his rest. But she never wearied in her kindness. In that silent home, it was the silent Emily who had ever a cheering word for Branwell; it was Emily who still remembered that he was her brother, without that remembrance freezing her heart to numbness. She still hoped to win him back by love; and the very force and sincerity of his guilty passion (an additional horror and sin in her sisters' eyes) was a claim on Emily, ever sympathetic to violent feeling. Thus it was she who, more than the

others, became familiarised with the agony, and doubts, and shame of that tormented soul; and if, in her little knowledge of the world, she imagined such wrested passions to be natural, it is not upon her, of a certainty, that the blame of her pity shall be laid.

As the time went on and Branwell grew worse and wilder, it was well for the lonely watcher that she was strong. At last he grew ill, and would be content to go to bed early and lie there half-stupefied with opium and drink. One such night, their father and Branwell being in bed, the sisters came upstairs to sleep. Emily had gone on first into the little passage room where she still slept, when Charlotte, passing Branwell's partly-opened door, saw a strange bright flare inside.

"Oh, Emily!" she cried, "the house is on fire!"

Emily came out, her fingers at her lips. She had remembered her father's great horror of fire; it was the one dread of a brave man; he would have no muslin curtains, no light dresses in his house. She came out silently and saw the flame; then, very white and determined, dashed from her room downstairs into the passage, where every night full pails of water stood. One in each hand she came upstairs. Anne, Charlotte, the young servant, shrinking against the wall, huddled together in amazed horror—Emily went straight on and entered the blazing room. In a short while the bright light ceased to flare. Fortunately the flame had not reached the woodwork: drunken Branwell, turning in his bed, must have upset the light on to his sheets, for they and the bed were all on fire, and he unconscious in the midst when Emily went in, even as Jane Eyre found Mr. Rochester. But it was with no reasonable, thankful human creature with whom Emily had to deal. After a few long moments, those still standing in the passage

saw her stagger out, white, with singed clothes, half-carrying in her arms, half-dragging, her besotted brother. She placed him in her bed, and took away the light; then assuring the hysterical girls that there could be no further danger, she bade them go and rest—but where she slept herself that night no one remembers now.

It must be very soon after this that Branwell began to sleep in his father's room. The old man, courageous enough, and conceiving that his presence might be some slight restraint on the drunken furies of his unhappy son, persisted in this arrangement, though often enough the girls begged him to relinquish it, knowing well enough what risk of life he ran. Not infrequently Branwell would declare that either he or his father should be dead before the morning; and well might it happen that in his insensate delirium he should murder the blind old man.

"The sisters often listened for the report of a pistol in the dead of the night, till watchful eye and hearkening ear grew heavy and dull with the perpetual strain upon their nerves. In the mornings young Brontë would saunter out, saying with a drunkard's incontinence of speech, 'The poor old man and I have had a terrible night of it. He does his best—the poor old man!—but it's all over with me'" (whimpering) "'it's *her* fault, *her* fault.'"*

And in such fatal progress two years went on, bringing the suffering in that house ever lower, ever deeper, sinking it day by day from bad to worse.

* Mrs. Gaskell.

CHAPTER XII.

WRITING POETRY.

WHILE Emily Brontë's hands were full of trivial labour, while her heart was buried with its charge of shame and sorrow, think not that her mind was more at rest. She had always used her leisure to study or create; and the dreariness of existence made this inner life of hers doubly precious now. There is a tiny copy of the 'Poems' of Ellis, Currer, and Acton Bell, which was Emily's own, marked with her name and with the date of every poem carefully written under its title, in her own cramped and tidy writing. It has been of great use to me in classifying the order of these poems, chiefly hymns to imagination, Emily's "Comforter," her "Fairy-love;" beseeching her to light such a light in the soul that the dull clouds of earthly skies may seem of scant significance.

The light that should be lit was indeed of supernatural brightness; a flame from under the earth; a flame of lightning from the skies; a beacon of awful warning. Although so much is scarcely evident in these early poems, gleaming with fantastic glow-worm fires, fairy prettinesses, or burning as solemnly and pale as tapers lit in daylight round a bier, yet, in whatever shape, "the light that never was on sea or land," the strange transfiguring shine of imagination, is present there.

No one in the house ever saw what things Emily wrote in the moments of pause from her pastry-making, in those brief sittings under the currants, in those long and lonely watches for her drunken brother. She did not write to be read, but only to relieve a burdened heart. "One day," writes Charlotte in 1850, recollecting the near, vanished past, "one day in the autumn of 1845, I accidentally lighted on a manuscript volume of verse in my sister Emily's handwriting. Of course I was not surprised, knowing that she could and did write verse. I looked it over, and something more than surprise seized me,—a deep conviction that these were not common effusions, not at all like the poetry women generally write. I thought them condensed and terse, vigorous and genuine. To my ear, they had also a peculiar music, wild, melancholy and elevating."

Very true; these poems with their surplus of imagination, their instinctive music and irregular rightness of form, their sweeping impressiveness, effects of landscape, their scant allusions to dogma or perfidious man, are, indeed, not at all like the poetry women generally write. The hand that painted this single line,

> "The dim moon struggling in the sky,"

should have shaken hands with Coleridge. The voice might have sung in concert with Blake that sang this single bit of a song:

> "Hope was but a timid friend;
> She sat without the grated den,
> Watching how my fate would tend,
> Even as selfish-hearted men.
>
> "She was cruel in her fear;
> Through the bars, one dreary day,
> I looked out to see her there,
> And she turned her face away!"

Had the poem ended here it would have been perfect, but it and many more of these lyrics have the uncertainty of close that usually marks early work. Often incoherent, too, the pictures of a dream rapidly succeeding each other without logical connection; yet scarcely marred by the incoherence, since the effect they seek to produce is not an emotion, not a conviction, but an impression of beauty, or horror, or ecstasy. The uncertain outlines are bathed in a vague golden air of imagination, and are shown to us with the magic touch of a Coleridge, a Leopardi—the touch which gives a mood, a scene, with scarce an obvious detail of either mood or scene. We may not understand the purport of the song, we understand the feeling that prompted the song, as, having done with reading 'Kubla Khan,' there remains in our mind, not the pictured vision of palace or dancer, but a personal participation in Coleridge's heightened fancy, a setting-on of reverie, an impression.

Read this poem, written in October, 1845—

"THE PHILOSOPHER.

"Enough of thought, philosopher,
Too long hast thou been dreaming
Unlightened, in this chamber drear,
While summer's sun is beaming!
Space-sweeping soul, what sad refrain
Concludes thy musings once again?

"Oh, for the time when I shall sleep
Without identity,
And never care how rain may steep,
Or snow may cover me!
No promised heaven, these wild desires
Could all, or half fulfil;
No threatened hell, with quenchless fires,
Subdue this quenchless will!

"So said I, and still say the same;
  Still, to my death, will say—
Three gods, within this little frame,
  Are warring night and day;
Heaven could not hold them all, and yet
  They all are held in me,
And must be mine till I forget
  My present entity!
Oh, for the time, when in my breast
  Their struggles will be o'er!
Oh, for the day, when I shall rest,
  And never suffer more!

"I saw a spirit, standing, man,
  Where thou dost stand—an hour ago,
And round his feet three rivers ran,
  Of equal depth, and equal flow—
A golden stream, and one like blood,
  And one like sapphire seemed to be;
But, where they joined their triple flood
  It tumbled in an inky sea.
The spirit sent his dazzling gaze
  Down through that ocean's gloomy night
Then, kindling all, with sudden blaze,
  The glad deep sparkled wide and bright—
White as the sun, far, far more fair,
  Than its divided sources were!

"And even for that spirit, seer,
  I've watched and sought my life-time long;
Sought him in heaven, hell, earth and air—
  An endless search, and always wrong!
Had I but seen his glorious eye
  Once light the clouds that 'wilder me,
I ne'er had raised this coward cry
  To cease to think, and cease to be;
I ne'er had called oblivion blest,
  Nor, stretching eager hands to death,
Implored to change for senseless rest
  This sentient soul, this living breath—

"Oh, let me die—that power and will
Their cruel strife may close;
And conquered good, and conquering ill
Be lost in one repose!"

Some semblance of coherence may, no doubt, be given to this poem by making the three first and the last stanzas to be spoken by the questioner, and the fourth by the philosopher. Even so, the subject has little charm. What we care for is the surprising energy with which the successive images are projected, the earnest ring of the verse, the imagination which invests all its changes. The man and the philosopher are but the clumsy machinery of the magic-lantern, the more kept out of view the better.

"Conquered good and conquering ill!" A thought that must often have risen in Emily's mind during this year and those succeeding. A gloomy thought, sufficiently strange in a country parson's daughter; one destined to have a great result in her work.

Of these visions which make the larger half of Emily's contribution to the tiny book, none has a more eerie grace than this day-dream of the 5th of March, 1844, sampled here by a few verses snatched out of their setting rudely enough:—

"On a sunny brae, alone I lay
One summer afternoon;
It was the marriage-time of May
With her young lover, June.

* * * *

"The trees did wave their plumy crests,
The glad birds carolled clear;
And I, of all the wedding guests,
Was only sullen there.

* * * *

"Now, whether it were really so,
I never could be sure,
But as in fit of peevish woe,
I stretched me on the moor,

"A thousand thousand gleaming fires
Seemed kindling in the air;
A thousand thousand silvery lyres
Resounded far and near:

"Methought, the very breath I breathed
Was full of sparks divine,
And all my heather-couch was wreathed
By that celestial shine!

"And, while the wide earth echoing rung
To their strange minstrelsy,
The little glittering spirits sung,
Or seemed to sing, to me."

* * * *

What they sang is indeed of little moment enough—a strain of the vague pantheistic sentiment common always to poets, but her manner of representing the little airy symphony is charming. It recalls the fairy-like brilliance of the moors at sunset, when the sun, slipping behind a western hill, streams in level rays on to an opposite crest, gilding with pale gold the fawn-coloured faded grass; tangled in the film of lilac seeding grasses, spread, like the bloom on a grape, over all the heath; sparkling on the crisp edges of the heather blooms, pure white, wild-rose colour, shell-tinted, purple; emphasising every grey-green spur of the undergrowth of ground-lichen; striking every scarlet-splashed, white-budded spray of ling: an iridescent, shimmering, dancing effect of white and pink and purple flowers; of lilac bloom, of grey-green and whitish-grey buds and branches, all crisply moving and dancing together in the breeze

on the hilltop. I have quoted that windy night in a line—

"The dim moon struggling in the sky."

Here is another verse to show how well she watched from her bedroom's wide window the grey far-stretching skies above the black far-stretching moors—

"And oh, how slow that keen-eyed star
Has tracked the chilly grey;
What, watching yet! how very far
The morning lies away."

Such direct, vital touches recall well-known passages in 'Wuthering Heights:' Catharine's pictures of the moors; that exquisite allusion to Gimmerton Chapel bells, not to be heard on the moors in summer when the trees are in leaf, but always heard at Wuthering Heights on quiet days following a great thaw or a season of steady rain.

But not, alas! in such fantasy, in such loving intimacy with nature, might much of Emily's sorrowful days be passed. Nor was it in her nature that all her dreams should be cheerful. The finest songs, the most peculiarly her own, are all of defiance and mourning, moods so natural to her that she seems to scarcely need the intervention of words in their confession. The wild, melancholy, and elevating music of which Charlotte wisely speaks is strong enough to move our very hearts to sorrow in such verses as the following, things which would not touch us at all were they written in prose; which have no personal note. Yet listen—

"Death! that struck when I was most confiding
In my certain faith of joy to be—
Strike again, Time's withered branch dividing
From the fresh root of Eternity!

"Leaves, upon Time's branch, were growing brightly,
Full of sap, and full of silver dew;
Birds beneath its shelter gathered nightly;
Daily round its flowers the wild bees flew.

"Sorrow passed, and plucked the golden blossom."

Solemn, haunting with a passion infinitely beyond the mere words, the mere image; because, in some wonderful way, the very music of the verse impresses, reminds us, declares the holy inevitable losses of death.

A finer poem yet is 'Remembrance,' written two years later, in the March of 1845; here the words and the thought are worthy of the music and the mood. It has vital passion in it; though it can scarcely be personal passion, since, "fifteen wild Decembers" before 1845, Emily Brontë was a girl of twelve years old, companionless, save for still living sisters, Branwell, her aunt, and the vicarage servants. Here, as elsewhere in the present volume, the creative instinct reveals itself in imagining emotions and not characters. The artist has supplied the passion of the lover.

"Cold in the earth—and the deep snow piled above thee,
Far, far removed, cold in the dreary grave!
Have I forgot, my only Love, to love thee,
Severed at last by Time's all-severing wave?

"Now, when alone, do my thoughts no longer hover
Over the mountains, on that northern shore,
Resting their wings where heath and fern-leaves cover
Thy noble heart for ever, evermore?

"Cold in the earth—and fifteen wild Decembers,
From those brown hills, have melted into spring:
Faithful, indeed, is the spirit that remembers
After such years of change and suffering!

"Sweet Love of youth, forgive, if I forget thee,
While the world's tide is bearing me along;
Other desires and other hopes beset me,
Hopes which obscure, but cannot do thee wrong.

"No later light has lightened up my heaven,
No second morn has ever shone for me;
All my life's bliss from thy dear life was given,
All my life's bliss is in the grave with thee.

"But, when the days of golden dreams had perished,
And even Despair was powerless to destroy,
Then did I learn how existence could be cherished,
Strengthened, and fed without the aid of joy.

"Then did I check the tears of useless passion—
Weaned my young soul from yearning after thine;
Sternly denied its burning wish to hasten
Down to that tomb already more than mine.

"And, even yet, I dare not let it languish,
Dare not indulge in memory's rapturous pain;
Once drinking deep of that divinest anguish,
How could I seek the empty world again?"

Better still, of a standard excellence, is a little poem, which, by some shy ostrich prompting, Emily chose to call

"THE OLD STOIC.

"Riches I hold in light esteem;
And Love I laugh to scorn;
And lust of fame was but a dream
That vanished with the morn:

"And if I pray, the only prayer
That moves my lips for me
Is, 'Leave the heart that now I bear,
And give me liberty!'

"Yes, as my swift days near their goal,
'Tis all that I implore;
In life and death, a chainless soul,
With courage to endure."

Throughout the book one recognises the capacity for producing something finer and quite different from what is here produced; one recognises so much, but not the

author of 'Wuthering Heights.' Grand impressions of mood and landscape reveal a remarkably receptive artistic temperament; splendid and vigorous movement of lines shows that the artist is a poet. Then we are in a *cul-de-sac.* There is no hint of what kind of poet—too reserved to be consistently lyric, there is not sufficient evidence of the dramatic faculty to help us on to the true scent. All we can say is that we have before us a mind capable of very complete and real illusions, haunted by imagination, always fantastic, and often terrible; a temperament reserved, fearless and brooding; a character of great strength and ruggedness, extremely tenacious of impressions. We must call in Monsieur Taine and his *Milieu* to account for 'Wuthering Heights.'

This first volume reveals an overpowering imagination which has not yet reached its proper outlet. It is painful, in reading these early poems, to feel how ruthless and horrible that strong imagination often was, as yet directed on no purposed line. Sometimes, indeed, sweet fancies came to Emily, but often they were visions of black dungeons, scenes of death, and hopeless parting, of madness and agony.

> "So stood I, in Heaven's glorious sun,
> And in the glare of Hell;
> My spirit drank a mingled tone,
> Of seraph's song, and demon's moan;
> What my soul bore, my soul alone
> Within itself may tell!"

It is painful, indeed, to think that the surroundings of this violent imagination, with its bias towards the capricious and the terrifying, were loneliness, sorrow, enforced companionship with degradation; a life so bitter, for a long time, and made so bitter through another's fault,

that Emily welcomed her fancies, even the gloomiest, as a happy outlet from reality.

"Oh, dreadful is the check—intense the agony—
When the ear begins to hear, and the eye begins to see;
When the pulse begins to throb, the brain to think again,
The soul to feel the flesh, and the flesh to feel the chain."

Such were the verses that Charlotte discovered one autumn day of 1845, which surprised her, with good reason, by their originality and music. Emily was not pleased by what in her eyes, so jealous of her liberty, must have seemed a deliberate interference with her property. "My sister Emily," continues Charlotte, "was not a person of demonstrative character, nor one on the recesses of whose mind and feelings even those nearest and dearest to her could intrude unlicensed; it took hours to reconcile her to the discovery I had made, and days to persuade her that such poems merited publication. I knew, however, that a mind like hers could not be without some latent spark of honourable ambition, and refused to be discouraged in my attempts to fan that spark to flame.

"Meantime, my younger sister quietly produced some of her own compositions, intimating that since Emily's had given me pleasure, I might like to look at some of hers. I could not but be a partial judge, yet I thought that these verses, too, had a sweet sincere pathos of their own."

Only a partial judge could find anything much to praise in gentle Anne's trivial verses. Had the book an index of first lines, what a scathing criticism on the contents would it be!

"Sweet are thy strains, celestial bard."
"I'll rest me in this sheltered bower."
"Oh, I am very weary, though tears no longer flow."

From such beginnings we too clearly foresee the hopeless bathos of the end. Poor child, her real, deep sorrows, expressed in such worn-out ill-fitting phrases, are as little touching as the beauty of a London shop-girl under the ready-made cast-off adornments of her second-hand finery.

Charlotte, however, knowing the real sorrow, the real meekness that inspired them, not unnaturally put into the trivial verses the pathos of the writer's circumstances. Of a truth, her own poems are not such as would justify any great rigour of criticism. They are often, as poems, actually inferior to Anne's, her manner of dragging in a tale or a moral at the end of a lyric having quite a comical effect; yet, on the whole, her share of the book clearly distinguishes her as an eloquent and imaginative *raconteuse*, at the same time that it denies her the least sprout, the smallest leaf, of that flowerless wreath of bays which Emily might claim. But at that time the difference was not so clearly distinguishable; though Charlotte ever felt and owned her sister's superiority in this respect, it was not recognised as of a sort to quite outshine her own little tales in verse, and quite outlustre Anne's pious effusions.

A packet of manuscript was selected, a little packet written in three different hands and signed by three names. The sisters did not wish to reveal their identity; they decided on a *nom de plume*, and chose the common north-country surname of Bell. They did not wish to be known as women: "we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudices;" yet their fastidious honour prevented them from wearing a mask they had no warrant for; to satisfy both scruples they assumed names that might equally belong to a man or a woman. In the part of Yorkshire where they lived

children are often christened by family names; over the shops they would see "Sunderland Akroyd," varied by "Pighills Sunderland," with scarce a John or James to bear them company. So there was nothing strange to them in the fashion so ingeniously turned to their own uses. Ellis veiled Emily; Currer, Charlotte; Acton, Anne. The first and last are common names enough—a Miss Currer who was one of the subscribers to Cowan's Bridge may have suggested her pseudonym to Charlotte. At last every detail was discussed, decided, and the packet sent off to London to try its fortunes in the world:—

"This bringing out of our little book was hard work. As was to be expected neither we nor our poems were at all wanted; but for this we had been prepared at the outset; though inexperienced ourselves, we had read the experience of others. The great puzzle lay in the difficulty of getting answers of any kind from the publishers to whom we applied. Being greatly harassed by this obstacle, I ventured to apply to the Messrs. Chambers of Edinburgh for a word of advice: *they* may have forgotten the circumstance, but *I* have not; for from them I received a brief and business-like but civi and sensible reply, on which we acted, and at last made a way." *

Ultimately the three sisters found a publisher who would undertake the work upon commission; a favourable answer came from Messrs. Aylott & Jones, of Paternoster Row, who estimated the expense of the book at thirty guineas. It was a great deal for the three sisters to spare from their earnings, but they were eager to print, eager to make sacrifices, as though in some dim way they saw already the glorious goal. But

* 'Memoir.' C. B.

at present there was business to do. They bought one of the numerous little primers that are always on sale to show the poor vain moth of amateur authorship how least to burn his wings—little books more eagerly bought and read than any of those that they bring into the world. Such a publisher's guide, meant for ambitious schoolboys, the Brontës bought and studied as anxiously as they. By the end of February all was settled, the type decided upon, the money despatched, the printers at work. Emily Brontë's copy is dated May 7th, 1846.

What eagerness at the untying of the parcel in which those first copies came! What disappointment, chequered with ecstasy, at reading their own verse, unaltered, yet in print! An experience not so common then as now; to be a poetess in those days had a certain distinction, and the three sisters must have anxiously waited for a greeting. The poems had been despatched to many magazines: *Colburne's*, *Bentley's*, *Hood's*, *Jerrold's*, *Blackwood's*, their early idol; to the *Edinburgh Review*, *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, the *Dublin University Magazine;* to the *Athenæum*, the *Literary Gazette*, the *Critic*, and to the *Daily News*, the *Times*, and to the *Britannia* newspaper. Surely from some quarter they would hear such an authentic word of warning or welcome as should confirm at once their hopes or their despairs. They had grown used to waiting; but they had long to wait. At last, on July 4th, the *Athenæum* reviewed their book in a short paragraph, and it is remarkable that, though in such reviews of the poems as appeared after the publication of 'Jane Eyre,' it is always Currer Bell's "fine sense of nature," Currer Bell's "matured intellect and masterly hand," that wins all the praise; still, in this early notice, the yet unblinded critic has perceived to whom the palm is due. Ellis Bell he places

first of the three supposed brothers, naming him "a fine quaint spirit with an evident power of wing that may reach heights not here attempted." Next to him the critic ranks Currer, lastly Anne. Scarce another notice did they see.

The little book was evidently a failure; it had fallen still-born from the press. Were all their hopes to die as soon as they were born? At least they resolved not to be too soon baffled, and already, in the thick of their disappointment, began to lay the plots of the novels they would write. Like our army, they gained their battles by never owning they were beaten.

They kept it all to themselves, this disappointment, these resolutions. When the inquisitive postman asked Mr. Brontë if he knew who was that Mr. Currer Bell for whom so many letters always came, the old gentleman answered with a sense of authority, "My good man, there is no such person in the parish;" and when, on rare occasions, Branwell came into the room where they were writing, no word was said of the work that was going on. Not even to the sisterly Ellen, so near to all their hearts, was any confession made of the way they spent their time.

"We have done nothing (to *speak* of) since you were here," says conscientious Anne. Nevertheless their friend drew her conclusions. About this time she came to stay at Haworth, and sometimes (a little amused at their reticence) she would tease them with her suspicions, to Charlotte's alarmed surprise. Once, at this time, when they were walking on the moor together, a sudden change and light came into the sky. "Look," said Charlotte; and the four girls looked up and saw three suns shining clearly overhead. They stood a little while silently gazing at the beautiful parhelion; Char-

lotte, her friend, and Anne clustered together, Emily a little higher, standing on a heathery knoll. "That is you!" said Ellen at last. "You are the three suns." "Hush!" cried Charlotte, indignant at the too shrewd nonsense of her friend; but as Ellen, her suspicions confirmed by Charlotte's violence, lowered her eyes to the earth again, she looked a moment at Emily. She was still standing on her knoll, quiet, satisfied; and round her lips there hovered a very soft and happy smile. She was not angry, the independent Emily. She had liked the little speech.

CHAPTER XIII.

TROUBLES.

WHILE Emily Brontë was striving to create a world of fancy and romance natural to her passionate spirit, the real, everyday existence in which she had to work and endure was becoming day by day more anxious and troubled. An almost unliveable life it seems, recalling it, stifled with the vulgar tragedy of Branwell's woes, the sordid cares that his debts entailed, the wearing anxiety that watched the oncoming blindness of old Mr. Brontë. These months of 1846 during which, let us remember, Emily was writing 'Wuthering Heights,' must have been the heaviest and dreariest of her days; it was during their weary course that she at last perceived how utterly hopeless, how insensible to good, must be the remaining life of her brother.

For so long as the future was left him, Branwell never reached the limit of abasement. He drank to drown sorrow, to deaden memory and the flight of time; he went far, but not too far to turn back when the day should dawn which should recall him to prosperity and happiness. He was still, though perverted and debased, capable of reform and susceptible to holy influences. He had not finally cast away goodness and honour; they were but momentarily discarded, like rings taken off for heavy work; by-and-by he would put them on again.

Suddenly the future was taken away. One morning, about six months after his dismissal, a letter came for Branwell announcing the death of his former employer. All he had ever hoped for lay at his feet—the good, wronged man was dead. His wife, his wealth, should now make Branwell glad. A new life, earned by sin and hatred, should begin; a new good life, honourable and happy. It was in Branwell's nature to be glad when peace and honour came to him, although he would make no effort to attain them, and this morning he was very happy.

"He fair danced down the churchyard as if he were out of his mind; he was so fond of that woman," says my informant.

The next morning he rose, dressed himself with care, and prepared for a journey, but before he had even set out from Haworth two men came riding to the village post haste. They sent for Branwell, and when he arrived, in a great state of excitement, one of the riders dismounted and went with him into the "Black Bull." They went into the brown parlour of the inn, the cheerful, wainscotted parlour, where Branwell had so often lorded it over his boon companions from his great three-cornered chair. After some time the messenger rose and left; and those who were in the inn thought they heard a strange noise in the parlour—a bleating like a calf's. Yet, being busy people, they did not go in to see if anything had happened, and amid the throng of their employments the sound passed out of their ears and out of their memory. Hours afterwards the young girl who used to help in the housework at the inn, the Anne who still remembers Branwell's fluent greetings, found occasion to enter the parlour. She went in and found him on the floor, looking changed and dreadful. He had

fallen down in a sort of stupefied fit. After that day he was an altered being.

The message he had heard had changed the current of his life. It was not the summons he expected; but a prayer from the woman he loved not to come near her, not to tempt her to ruin; if she saw him once, the care of her children, the trust of their fortunes, all was forfeited. She entreated him to keep away; anxious, perhaps, in this sudden loneliness of death, to retrieve the past, or by some tender superstition made less willing to betray the dead than the living; or, it may be, merely eager to retain at all costs the rank, the station, the honours to which she was accustomed. Be it as it may, Branwell found himself forgotten.

> "Oh, dreadful heart of woman,
> That in one day forgets what man remembers,
> Forgetting him therewith."

After that day he was different. He despaired, and drank himself to death, drinking to the grave and forgetfulness, gods of his Sabbath, and borrowing a transient pleasure at fearful interest. But to such a man the one supreme temptation is enjoyment: it must be had, though life and heaven go forfeit. And while he caroused, "and by his whole manner gave indications of intense enjoyment,"* his old father grew quite blind, Anne day by day more delicate and short of breath, ambitious Charlotte pined like an eagle in a cage, and Emily, writing 'Wuthering Heights,' called those affected who found the story more terrible than life.

It was she who saw most of her abandoned brother, for Anne could only shudder at his sin, and Charlotte was too indignant for pity. But Emily, the stern, charit-

* George Searle Phillips.

able woman, who spared herself no pang, who loved to carry tenderly the broken-winged nestlings in her hard-working hands, Emily was not revolted by his weakness. Shall I despise the deer for his timid swiftness to fly, or the leveret because it cannot die bravely, or mock the death-agony of the wolf because the beast is gaunt and foul to see? she asks herself in one of the few personal poems she has left us. No! An emphatic no; for Emily Brontë had a place in her heart for all the wild children of nature, and to despise them for their natural instincts was impossible to her. And thus it came about that she ceased to grow indignant at Branwell's follies; she made up her mind to accept with angerless sorrow his natural vices. All that was left of her ready disdain was an extreme patience which expected no reform, asked no improvement; the patience she had for the leveret and the wolf, things contemptible and full of harm, yet not so by their own choice; the patience of acquiescent and hopeless despair.

Branwell's pity was all for himself. He did not spare the pious household forced into the contamination of his evil habits. "Nothing happens at Haworth," says Charlotte; "nothing at least of a pleasant kind. One little incident occurred about a week ago to sting us into life; but, if it give no more pleasure for you to hear than it does for us to witness, you will scarcely thank me for adverting to it. It was merely the arrival of a sheriff's officer on a visit to Branwell, inviting him either to pay his debts or take a trip to York. Of course his debts had to be paid. It is not agreeable to lose money, time after time, in this way; but where is the use of dwelling on such subjects. It will make him no better." *

Reproaches only hardened his heart and made him

* Mrs. Gaskell.

feel himself more than ever abused by circumstances and fate. "Sometimes," * says Mr. Phillips, "he would complain of the way he was treated at home, and, as an instance, related the following :—

"One of the Sunday-school girls, in whom he and all his house took much interest, fell very sick, and they were afraid she would not live.

"'I went to see the poor little thing,' he said, 'sat with her half-an-hour and read a psalm to her and a hymn at her request. I felt very much like praying with her too,' he added, his voice trembling with emotion, 'but you see I was not good enough. How dare I pray for another, who had almost forgotten how to pray for myself? I came away with a heavy heart, for I felt sure she would die, and went straight home, where I fell into melancholy musings. I wanted somebody to cheer me. I often do; but no kind word finds its way to my ears, much less to my heart. Charlotte observed my depression, and asked what ailed me. So I told her. She looked at me with a look which I shall never forget, if I live to be a hundred years old—which I never shall. It was not like her at all. It wounded me, as if some one had struck me a blow in the mouth. It involved ever so many things in it. It was a dubious look. It ran over me, questioning and examining, as if I had been a wild beast. It said, 'Did my ears deceive me, or did I hear ought?' And then came the painful, baffled expression which was worse than all. It said, 'I wonder if that's true?' But, as she left the room, she seemed to accuse herself of having wronged me, and smiled kindly upon me and said, 'She is my little scholar and I will go and see her.' I replied not a word. I was too much cut up. When she was gone, I came

* 'Branwell Brontë.' G. S. Phillips.

over here to the "Black Bull" and made a night of it in sheer disgust and desperation. Why could they not give me some credit when I was trying to be good?'"

In such wise the summer of 1846 drew on, wearily enough, with increased economies in the already frugal household, that Branwell's debts might honourably be paid, with gathering fears for the father, on whom dyspepsia and blindness were laying heavy hands. He could no longer see to read; he, the great walker who loved to ramble alone, could barely grope his way about; all that was left to him of sight was the ability to recognise well-known figures standing in a strong light. Yet he still continued to preach; standing grey and sightless in the pulpit, uttering what words (perforce unstudied) came to his lips. Himself in his sorrowful age and stern endurance a most noble and comprehensible sermon.

His spirits were much depressed; for now he could no longer forget himself in his lonely studies, no longer walk on the free moors alone when trouble invaded the narrow house below. He lived now of necessity in intimate relation with his children; he depended on them. And now he made acquaintance with the heroic nature of his daughters, and saw the petty drudgery of their lives, and how worthily they turned it to a grace in the wearing of it. And now he saw clearly the vain, dependent, passionate temperament of his son, and knew how, by the lack of training, the plant had been ruined and draggled in the mire, which might have beautifully flowered and borne good fruit had it been staked and supported; the poor espalier thing that could not stand alone. Nemesis had visited his home. He felt the consequences of his selfishness, his arrogance, his cold isolation, and bitterly, bitterly he mourned.

The cataract grew month by month, a thickening veil

that blotted out the world; and month by month the old blind man sat wearily thinking through the day of his dear son's ruin, for he had ever loved Branwell the best, and lay at night listening for his footsteps; while below, alone, his daughter watched as wearily for the prodigal's return.

The three girls looked on and longed to help. All that they could do they did, Charlotte being her father's constant helper and companion; but all they could do was little. They would not reconcile themselves to see him sink into blindness. They busied themselves in collecting what information they could glean concerning operations upon cataract, and the names of oculists. But at present there was nothing to do but wait and endure; for even they, with their limited knowledge, could tell that their father's eyes were not ready yet for the surgeon's knife.

Meanwhile they worked in secret at their novels. So soon as the poems had been sent off, and even when it was evident that that venture, too, had failed, the sisters determined to try and earn a livelihood by writing. They could no longer leave their home, their father being helpless and Branwell worse than helpless; yet, with ever-increasing expenses and no earnings, bare living was difficult to compass. The future, too, was uncertain; should their father's case prove hopeless, should he become quite blind, ill, incapable of work, they would be homeless indeed. With such gloomy boding in their hearts, with such stern impelling necessity bidding them strive and ever strive again, as a baffled swimmer strives for land, these three sisters began their work. Two of them, in after time, were to be known through all the world, were to be influences for all time to come and, a new glory in the world

not known before their days, were to make up "with Mrs. Browning, the perfect trinity of English female fame."* But with little thought of this, heavily and very wearily, they set out upon their undertaking.

Every evening when the sewing was put away the writing was begun, the three sisters, sitting round the table, or more often marching round and round the room as in their schoolgirl days, would hold solemn council over the progress of their work. The division of chapters, the naming of characters, the progress of events, was then decided, so that each lent a hand to the other's work. Then, such deliberations done, the paper would be drawn out, and the casual notes of the day corrected and writ fair; and for an hour or more there would be no sound save the scratching of pens on the paper and the gusty wailing of the wind outside.

Such methodical work makes rapid progress. In a few months each sister had a novel completed. Charlotte, a grave and quiet study of Belgian life and character, 'The Professor;' Anne, a painstaking account of a governess's trials, which she entitled 'Agnes Grey.' Emily's story was very different, and less perceptibly interwoven with her own experience. We all know at least the name of 'Wuthering Heights.'

The novels were sent off, and at first seemed even less likely of success than the school had been, or the book of verses. Publisher after publisher rejected them; then, thinking that perhaps it was not cunning to send the three novels in a batch, since the ill-success of one might prejudice all, the sisters sent them separately to try their chance. But ever with the same result—month after month, came rejection.

At home affairs continued no less disheartening.

* A. C. Swinburne. 'Note on Charlotte Brontë.'

Branwell often laid up with violent fits of sickness, Mr. Brontë becoming more utterly blind. At last, in the end of July, Emily and Charlotte set out for Manchester to consult an oculist. There they heard of Mr. Wilson as the best, and to him they went; but only to find that no decisive opinion could be given until their father's eyes had been examined. Yet, not disheartened, they went back to Haworth; for at least they had discovered a physician and had made sure that, even at their father's advanced age, an operation might prove successful. Therefore, at the end of August, Charlotte, who was her father's chief companion and the most easily spared from home, took old Mr. Brontë to Manchester. Mr. Wilson pronounced his eyes ready for the operation, and the old man and his daughter went into lodgings for a month. "I wonder how Emily and Anne will get on at home with Branwell," says Charlotte, accustomed to be the guide and leader of that little household.

Hardly enough, no doubt; for Anne was little fitted now to struggle against fate. She never had completely rallied from the prolonged misery of her sojourn with Branwell in that fatal house which was to blight their future and be blighted by them. She grew weaker and weaker, that "gentle little one," so tender, so ill fitted to her rugged and gloomy path of life. Emily looked on with a breaking heart; trouble encompassed her on every side; her father blind in Manchester; her brother drinking himself to death at home; her sister failing, paling day by day; and every now and then a letter would come announcing that such and such a firm of publishers had no use for 'Agnes Grey' and 'Wuthering Heights.'

Charlotte in Manchester fared little better. 'The Professor' had been returned to her on the very day

of her father's operation, when (bearing this unspoken-of blow as best she might) she had to stay in the room while the cataract was removed from his eyes. Exercise makes courage strong; that evening, when her father in his darkened room might no longer speak or be spoken to, that very evening she began 'Jane Eyre.'

This was being braver than brave Emily, who has left us nothing, save a few verses, written later than 'Wuthering Heights.' But at Haworth there was labour and to spare for every instant of the busy days, and Charlotte, in Manchester, found her unaccustomed leisure and unoccupied confinement very dreary.

Towards the end of September Mr. Brontë was pronounced on a fair way to recovery, and he and Charlotte set out for Haworth. It was a happy home-coming, for things had prospered better than Charlotte had dared to hope during the latter weeks of her absence. Every day the old man grew stronger, and little by little his sight came back. He could see the glorious purple of the moors, Emily's moors, no less beloved in her sorrowing womanhood than in her happy hoyden time of youth. He could see his children's faces, and the miserable change in Branwell's features. He began to be able to read a little, a very little at a time, and by November was sufficiently recovered to take the whole duty of the three Sunday services upon himself.

Not long after this time, three members of that quiet household were still further cheered by learning that 'Agnes Grey' and 'Wuthering Heights' had found acceptance at the hands of a publisher. Acceptance; but upon impoverishing terms. Still, for so much they were thankful. To write, and bury unread the things one has written, is playing music upon a dumb piano. Who plays, would fain be heard.

CHAPTER XIV.

'WUTHERING HEIGHTS:' ITS ORIGIN.

A GREY old Parsonage standing among graves, remote from the world on its wind-beaten hill-top, all round the neighbouring summits wild with moors; a lonely place among half-dead ash-trees and stunted thorns, the world cut off on one side by the still ranks of the serried dead, and distanced on the other by mile-long stretches of heath: such, we know, was Emily Brontë's home.

An old, blind, disillusioned father, once prone to an extraordinary violence of temper, but now grown quiet with age, showing his disappointment with life by a melancholy cynicism that was quite sincere; two sisters, both beloved, one, fired with genius and quick to sentiment, hiding her enthusiasm under the cold demeanour of the ex-governess, unsuccessful, and unrecognised; the other gentler, dearer, fairer, slowly dying, inch by inch, of the blighting neighbourhood of vice. One brother, scarce less dear, of set purpose drinking himself to death out of furious thwarted passion for a mistress that he might not marry: these were the members of Emily Brontë's household.

Herself we know: inexperienced, courageous, passionate, and full of pity. Was is wonderful that she summed up life in one bitter line?—

"Conquered good and conquering ill."

Her own circumstances proved the axiom true, and of other lives she had but little knowledge. Whom should she ask? The gentle Ellen who seemed of another world, and yet had plentiful troubles of her own? The curates she despised for their narrow priggishness? The people in the village of whom she knew nothing save when sickness, wrong, or death summoned her to their homes to give help and protection? Her life had given only one view of the world, and she could not realise that there were others which she had not seen.

"I am bound to avow," says Charlotte, "that she had scarcely more practical knowledge of the peasantry among whom she lived than a nun has of the country people that pass her convent gates. My sister's disposition was not naturally gregarious; circumstances favoured and fostered her tendency to seclusion; except to go to church, or to take a walk on the hills, she rarely crossed the threshold of home. Though her feeling for the people round her was benevolent, intercourse with them she never sought, nor, with very few exceptions, ever experienced; and yet she knew them, knew their ways, their language, their family histories; she could hear of them with interest and talk of them with detail, minute, graphic, and accurate; but with them she rarely exchanged a word. Hence it ensued that what her mind had gathered of the real concerning them was too exclusively confined to those tragic and terrible traits of which, in listening to the secret annals of every rude vicinage, the memory is sometimes compelled to receive the impress. Her imagination, which was a spirit more sombre than sunny, more powerful than sportive, found in such traits materials whence it wrought creations like Heathcliff, like Earnshaw, like Catharine. Having formed these beings she did not know what she had done. If

the auditors of her work, when read in manuscript, shuddered under the grinding influence of natures so relentless and implacable—of spirits so lost and fallen; if it was complained that the mere hearing of certain vivid and fearful scenes banished sleep by night and disturbed mental peace by day, Ellis Bell would wonder what was meant and suspect the complainant of affectation. Had she but lived, her mind would of itself have grown like a strong tree—loftier and straighter, wider spreading—and its matured fruits would have attained a mellower ripening and sunnier bloom; but on that mind time and experience alone could work, to the influence of other intellects it was not amenable." *

Yet no human being is wholly free, none wholly independent, of surroundings. And Emily Brontë least of all could claim such immunity. We can with difficulty just imagine her a prosperous heiress, loving and loved, high-spirited and even hoydenish; but with her cavalier fantasy informed by a gracious splendour all her own, we can just imagine Emily Brontë as Shirley Keeldar, but scarcely Shirley Keeldar writing 'Wuthering Heights.' Emily Brontë away from her moors, her loneliness, her poverty, her discipline, her companionship with genius, violence and degradation, would have taken another colour, as hydrangeas grow now red, now blue, according to the nature of the soil. It was not her lack of knowledge of the world that made the novel she wrote become 'Wuthering Heights,' not her inexperience, but rather her experience, limited and perverse, indeed, and specialised by a most singular temperament, yet close and very real. Her imagination was as much inspired by the circumstances of her life, as was Anne's when she wrote the 'Tenant of Wildfell Hall,' or Char-

* 'Memoir.' Charlotte Brontë.

lotte's in her masterpiece 'Villette;' but, as in each case the imagination was of a different quality, experience, acting upon it, produced a distinct and dissimilar result; a result obtained no less by the contrariety than by the harmony of circumstance. For our surroundings affect us in two ways; subtly and permanently, tinging us through and through as wine tinges water, or, by some violent neighbourhood of antipathetic force, sending us off at a tangent as far as possible from the antagonistic presence that so detestably environs us. The fact that Charlotte Brontë knew chiefly clergymen is largely responsible for 'Shirley,' that satirical eulogy of the Church and apotheosis of Sunday-school teachers. But Emily, living in this same clerical evangelistic atmosphere, is revolted, forced to the other extreme; and, while sheltering her true opinions from herself under the all-embracing term "Broad Church," we find in her writings no belief so strong as the belief in the present use and glory of life; no love so great as her love for earth—earth the mother and grave; no assertion of immortality, but a deep certainty of rest. There is no note so often struck in all her work, and struck with such variety of emphasis, as this: that good for goodness' sake is desirable, evil for evil's sake detestable, and that for the just and the unjust alike there is rest in the grave.

This quiet clergyman's daughter, always hearing evil of Dissenters, has therefore from pure courage and revolted justice become a dissenter herself. A dissenter in more ways than one. Never was a nature more sensitive to the stupidities and narrowness of conventional opinion, a nature more likely to be found in the ranks of the opposition; and with such a nature indignation is the force that most often looses the gate of

speech. The impulse to reveal wrongs and sufferings as they really are, is overwhelmingly strong; although the revelation itself be imperfect. What, then, would this inexperienced Yorkshire parson's danghter reveal? The unlikeness of life to the authorised pictures of life; the force of evil, only conquerable by the slow-revolving process of nature which admits not the eternal duration of the perverse; the grim and fearful lessons of heredity; the sufficiency of the finite to the finite, of life to life, with no other reward than the conduct of life fulfils to him that lives; the all-penetrating kinship of living things, heather-sprig, singing lark, confident child, relentless tyrant; and, not least, not least to her already in its shadow, the sure and universal peace of death.

A strange evangel from such a preacher; but a faith evermore emphasised and deeper rooted in Emily's mind by her incapacity to acquiesce in the stiff, pragmatic teaching, the narrow prejudice, of the Calvinists of Haworth. Yet this very Calvinism influenced her ideas, this doctrine she so passionately rejected, calling herself a disciple of the tolerant and thoughtful Frederick Maurice, and writing, in defiance of its flames and shriekings, the most soothing consolations to mortality that I remember in our tongue.

Nevertheless, so dual-natured is the force of environment, this antagonistic faith, repelling her to the extreme rebound of belief, did not send her out from it before she had assimilated some of its sternest tenets. From this doctrine of reward and punishment she learned that for every unchecked evil tendency there is a fearful expiation; though she placed it not indeed in the flames of hell, but in the perverted instincts of our own children. Terrible theories of doomed incurable sin and predestined loss warned her that an evil stock will only

beget contamination: the children of the mad must be liable to madness; the children of the depraved, bent towards depravity; the seed of the poison-plant springs up to blast and ruin, only to be overcome by uprooting and sterilisation, or by the judicious grafting, the patient training of many years.

Thus prejudiced and evangelical Haworth had prepared the woman who rejected its Hebraic dogma, to find out for herself the underlying truths. She accepted them in their full significance. It has been laid as a blame to her that she nowhere shows any proper abhorrence of the fiendish and vindictive Heathcliff. She who reveals him remembers the dubious parentage of that forsaken seaport baby, "Lascar or Gipsy;" she remembers the Ishmaelitish childhood, too much loved and hated, of the little interloper whose hand was against every man's hand. Remembering this, she submits as patiently to his swarthy soul and savage instincts as to his swarthy skin and "gibberish that nobody could understand." From thistles you gather no grapes.

No use, she seems to be saying, in waiting for the children of evil parents to grow, of their own will and unassisted, straight and noble. The very quality of their will is as inherited as their eyes and hair. Heathcliff is no fiend or goblin; the untrained doomed child of some half-savage sailor's holiday, violent and treacherous. And how far shall we hold the sinner responsible for a nature which is itself the punishment of some forefather's crime. Even for such there must be rest. No possibility in the just and reverent mind of Emily Brontë that the God whom she believed to be the very fount and soul of life could condemn to everlasting fire the victims of morbid tendencies not chosen by themselves. No purgatory, and no everlasting flame, is needed to

purify the sins of Heathcliff; his grave on the hillside will grow as green as any other spot of grass, moor-sheep will find the grass as sweet, heath and harebells will grow of the same colour on it as over a baby's grave. For life and sin and punishment end with death to the dying man; he slips his burden then on to other shoulders, and no visions mar his rest.

"I wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth." So ends the last page of 'Wuthering Heights.'

So much for the theories of life and evil that the clash of circumstance and character struck out from Emily Brontë. It happened, as we know, that she had occasion to test these theories; and but for that she could never have written 'Wuthering Heights.' Not that the story, the conception, would have failed. After all there is nothing more appalling in the violent history of that upland farm than many a midland manor set thick in elms, many a wild country-house of Wales or Cornwall could unfold. Stories more socially painful than the mere brute violence of the Earnshaws; of madness and treachery, stories of girls entrapped unwillingly into a lunatic marriage that the estate might have an heir; legends of fearful violence, of outcast children, dishonoured wives, horrible and persistent evil. Who, in the secret places of his memory, stores not up such haunting gossip? And Emily, familiar with all the wild stories of Haworth for a century back, and nursed on grisly Irish horrors, tales of 1798, tales of oppression and misery, Emily, with all this eerie lore at her finger-ends, would have the less difficulty in combining and working the separate motives into a consistent whole, that she did not know the real people whose histories she knew by heart. No memory of individual manner,

dominance or preference for an individual type, caught and disarranged her theories, her conception being the completer from her ignorance This much her strong reason and her creative power enabled her to effect. But this is not all.

This is the plot; but to make a character speak, act, rave, love, live, die, through a whole lifetime of events, even as the readers feel convinced he must have acted, must have lived and died, this demands at least so much experience of a somewhat similar nature as may serve for a base to one's imagination, a reserve of certainty and reassurance on which to draw in times of perplexity and doubt. Branwell, who sat to Anne sorrily enough for the portrait of Henry Huntingdon, served his sister Emily, not indeed as a model, a thing to copy, but as a chart of proportions by which to measure, and to which to refer, for correct investiture, the inspired idea. Mr. Wemyss Reid (whose great knowledge of the Brontë history and still greater kindness in admitting me to his advantages as much as might be, I cannot sufficiently acknowledge) —this capable critic perceives a *bonâ fide* resemblance between the character of Heathcliff and the character of Branwell Brontë as he appeared to his sister Emily. So much, bearing in mind the verse concerning the leveret, I own I cannot see. Branwell seems to me more nearly akin to Heathcliff's miserable son than to Heathcliff. But that, in depicting Heathcliff's outrageous thwarted love for Catharine, Emily did draw upon her experience of her brother's suffering, this extract from an unpublished lecture of Mr. Reid's will sufficiently reveal * :—

"It was in the enforced companionship of this lost and degraded man that Emily received, I am sure, many of the impressions which were subsequently

* 'Emily Brontë.' T. Wemyss Reid.

conveyed to the pages of her book. Has it not been said over and over again by critics of every kind that 'Wuthering Heights' reads like the dream of an opium-eater? And here we find that during the whole time of the writing of the book an habitual and avowed opium-eater was at Emily's elbow. I said that perhaps the most striking part of 'Wuthering Heights' was that which deals with the relations of Heathcliff and Catharine after she had become the wife of another. Whole pages of the story are filled with the ravings and ragings of the villain against the man whose life stands between him and the woman he loves. Similar ravings are to be found in all the letters of Branwell Brontë written at this period of his career; and we may be sure that similar ravings were always on his lips as, moody and more than half mad, he wandered about the rooms of the parsonage at Haworth. Nay, I have found some striking verbal coincidences between Branwell's own language and passages in 'Wuthering Heights.' In one of his own letters there are these words in reference to the object of his passion: 'My own life without her will be hell. What can the so-called love of her wretched sickly husband be to her compared with mine?' Now, turn to 'Wuthering Heights' and you will read these words: 'Two words would comprehend my future—death and hell; existence after losing her would be hell. Yet I was a fool to fancy for a moment that she valued Edgar Linton's attachment more than mine. If he loved with all the powers of his puny being, he couldn't love in eighty years as much as I could in a day.'"

So much share in 'Wuthering Heights' Branwell certainly had. He was a page of the book in which his sister studied; he served, as to an artist's temperament all things unconsciously serve, for the rough block of granite

out of which the work is hewn, and, even while with difficulty enduring his vices, Emily undoubtedly learned from them those darker secrets of humanity necessary to her tragic incantation. They served her, those dreaded, passionate outbreaks of her brother's, even as the moors she loved, the fancy she courted, served her. Strange divining wand of genius, that conjures gold out of the miriest earth of common life; strange and terrible faculty laying up its stores and half-mechanically drawing its own profit out of our slightest or most miserable experiences, noting the gesture with which the mother hears of her son's ruin, catching the faint varying shadow that the white wind-shaken window-blind sends over the dead face by which we watch, drawing its life from a thousand deaths, humiliations, losses, with a hand in our sharpest joys and bitterest sorrows; this faculty was Emily Brontë's, and drew its profit from her brother's shame.

Here ended Branwell's share in producing 'Wuthering Heights.' But it is not well to ignore his claim to its entire authorship; for in the contemptuous silence of those who know their falsity, such slanders live and thrive like unclean insects under fallen stones. The vain boast of an unprincipled dreamer, half-mad with opium, half-drunk with gin, meaning nothing but the desire to be admired at any cost, has been given too much prominence by those lovers of sensation who prefer any startling lie to an old truth. Their ranks have been increased by the number of those who, ignorant of the true circumstances of Emily's life, found it impossible that an inexperienced girl could portray so much violence and such morbid passion. On the contrary, given these circumstances, none but a personally inexperienced girl could have treated the subject with the absolute and

sexless purity which we find in 'Wuthering Heights.' How *infecte*, commonplace, and ignominious would Branwell, relying on his own recollections, have made the thwarted passion of a violent adventurer for a woman whose sickly husband both despise! That purity as of polished steel, as cold and harder than ice, that freedom in dealing with love and hate, as audacious as an infant's love for the bright flame of fire, could only belong to one whose intensity of genius was rivalled by the narrowness of her experience—an experience limited not only by circumstances, but by a nature impervious to any fierier sentiment than the natural love of home and her own people, beginning before remembrance and as unconscious as breathing.

The critic, having Emily's poems and the few remaining verses and letters of Branwell, cannot doubt the incapacity of that unnerved and garrulous prodigal to produce a work of art so sustained, passionate, and remote. For in no respect does the terse, fiery, imaginative style of Emily resemble the weak, disconnected, now vulgar, now pretty mannerisms of Branwell. There is, indeed, scant evidence that the writer of Emily's poems could produce 'Wuthering Heights;' but there is, at any rate, the impossibility that her work could be void of fire, concentration, and wild fancy. As great an impossibility as that vulgarity and tawdriness should not obtrude their ugly heads here and there from under Branwell's finest phrases. And since there is no single vulgar, trite, or Micawber-like effusion throughout 'Wuthering Heights;' and since Heathcliff's passion is never once treated in the despicable would-be worldly fashion in which Branwell describes his own sensations, and since at the time that 'Wuthering Heights' was written he was manifestly, and by his own confession,

too physically prostrate for any literary effort, we may conclude that Branwell did not write the book.

On the other side we have not only the literary evidence of the similar qualities in 'Wuthering Heights' and in the poems of Ellis Bell, but the express and reiterated assurance of Charlotte Brontë, who never even dreamed, it would seem, that it could be supposed her brother wrote the book; the testimony of the publishers who made their treaty with Ellis Bell; of the servant Martha who saw her mistress writing it; and—most convincing of all to those who have appreciated the character of Emily Brontë—the impossibility that a spirit so upright and so careless of fame should commit a miserable fraud to obtain it.

Indeed, so baseless is this despicable rumour that to attack it seems absurd, only sometimes it is wise to risk an absurdity. Puny insects, left too long unhurt, may turn out dangerous enemies irretrievably damaging the fertile vine on which they fastened in the security of their minuteness.

To the three favouring circumstances of Emily's masterpiece, which we have already mentioned—the neighbourhood of her home, the character of her disposition, the quality of her experience—a fourth must be added, inferior in degree, and yet not absolutely unimportant. This is her acquaintance with German literature, and especially with Hoffmann's tales. In Emily Brontë's day, Romance and Germany had one significance; it is true that in London and in prose the German influence was dying out, but in distant Haworth, and in the writings of such poets as Emily would read, in Scott, in Southey, most of all in Coleridge, with whose poems her own have so distinct an affinity, it is still predominant. Of the materialistic influence of Italy,

of atheist Shelley, Byron with his audacity and realism, sensuous Keats, she would have little experience in her remote parsonage. And, had she known them, they would probably have made no impression on a nature only susceptible to kindred influences. Thackeray, her sister's hero, might have never lived for all the trace of him we find in Emily's writings; never is there any single allusion in her work to the most eventful period of her life, that sight of the lusher fields and taller elms of middle England; that glimpse of hurrying vast London; that night on the river, the sun slipping behind the masts, doubly large through the mist and smoke in which the houses, bridges, ships are all spectral and dim. No hint of this, nor of the sea, nor of Belgium, with its quaint foreign life; nor yet of that French style and method so carefully impressed upon her by Monsieur Héger, and which so decidedly moulded her elder sister's art. But in the midst of her business at Haworth we catch a glimpse of her reading her German book at night, as she sits on the hearthrug with her arm round Keeper's neck; glancing at it in the kitchen, where she is making bread, with the volume of her choice propped up before her; and by the style of the novel jotted down in the rough, almost simultaneously with her reading, we know that to her the study of German was not—like French and music—the mere necessary acquirement of a governess, but an influence that entered her mind and helped to shape the fashion of her thoughts.

So much preface is necessary to explain, not the genius of Emily Brontë, but the conditions of that genius—there is no use saying more. The aim of my writing has been missed if the circumstances of her career are not present in the mind of my reader. It is

too late at this point to do more than enumerate them, and briefly point to their significance. Such criticism, in face of the living work, is all too much like glancing in a green and beautiful country at a map, from which one may, indeed, ascertain the roads that lead to it and away, and the size of the place in relation to surrounding districts, but which can give no recognisable likeness of the scene which lies all round us, with its fresh life forgotten and its beauty disregarded. Therefore let us make an end of theory and turn to the book on which our heroine's fame is stationed, fronting eternity. It may be that in unravelling its story and noticing the manner in which its facts of character and circumstance impressed her mind, we may, for a moment, be admitted to a more thorough and clearer insight into its working than we could earn by the completest study of external evidence, the most earnest and sympathising criticism.

CHAPTER XV.

'WUTHERING HEIGHTS:' THE STORY.

On the summit of Haworth Hill, beyond the street, stands a grey stone house, which is shown as the original of 'Wuthering Heights.' A few scant and wind-baffled ash-trees grow in front, the moors rise at the back stretching away for miles. It is a house of some pretensions, once the parsonage of Grimshaw, that powerful Wesleyan preacher who, whip in hand, used to visit the "Black Bull" on Sunday morning and lash the merrymakers into chapel to listen to his sermon. Somewhat fallen from its former pretensions, it is a farmhouse now, with much such an oak-lined and stone-floored house-place as is described in 'Wuthering Heights.' Over the door there is, moreover, a piece of carving: H. E. 1659, a close enough resemblance to "Hareton Earnshaw, 1500"—but the "wilderness of crumbling griffins and shameless little boys" are nowhere to be found. Neither do we notice "the excessive slant of a few stunted firs at the end of the house and a range of gaunt thorns all stretching their limbs one way as if craving alms of the sun," and, to my thinking, this fine old farm of Sowdens is far too near the mills of Haworth to represent the God-forsaken, lonely house of Emily's fancy. Having seen the place, as in duty bound, one returns more than ever impressed by the fact that while every individual and every site in Charlotte's novels can

be clearly identified, Emily's imagination and her power of drawing conclusions are alone responsible for the character of her creations. This is not saying that she had no data to go upon. Had she not seen Sowdens, and many more such houses, she would never have invented 'Wuthering Heights;' the story and passion of Branwell set on her fancy to imagine the somewhat similar story and passion of Heathcliff. But in the process of her work, the nature of her creations completely overmastered the facts and memories which had induced her to begin. These were but the handful of dust which she took to make her man; and the qualities and defects of her masterpiece are both largely accounted for when we remember that her creation of character was quite unmodified by any attempt at portraiture.

Therefore in 'Wuthering Heights' it is with a story, a fancy picture, that we have to deal; in drawing and proportion not unnatural, but certainly not painted after nature. To quote her sister's beautiful comments—

"'Wuthering Heights' was hewn in a wild workshop, with simple tools, out of homely materials. The statuary found a granite block on a solitary moor; gazing thereon he saw how from the crag might be elicited a head, savage, swart, sinister; a form moulded with at least one element of grandeur—power. He wrought with a rude chisel, and from no model but the vision of his meditations. With time and labour the crag took human shape; and there it stands colossal, dark and frowning, half-statue, half-rock; in the former sense, terrible and goblin-like; in the latter, almost beautiful, for its colouring is of mellow grey, and moorland moss clothes it; and heath, with its blooming bells and balmy fragrance, grows faithfully close to the giant's foot."

Of the rude chisel we find plentiful traces in the first few chapters of the book. The management of the narrative is singularly clumsy, introduced by a Mr. Lockwood—a stranger to the North, an imaginary misanthropist, who has taken a grange on the moor to be out of the way of the world—and afterwards continued to him by his housekeeper to amuse the long leisures of a winter illness. But, passing over this initial awkwardness of conception, we find a manner equal to the matter and somewhat resent Charlotte's eloquent comparison; for there are touches, fine and delicate, that only a practised hand may dare to give, and there is feeling in the book, not only "terrible and goblin-like," but patient and constant, sprightly and tender, consuming and passionate. We find, getting over the inexperienced beginning, that the style of the work is noble and accomplished, and that—far from being a half-hewn and casual fancy, a head surmounting a trunk of stone—its plan is thought out with scientific exactness, no line blurred, no clue forgotten, the work of an intense and poetic temperament whose vision is too vivid to be incongruous.

The first four chapters of 'Wuthering Heights' are merely introductory. They relate Mr. Lockwood's visit there, his surprise at the rudeness of the place in contrast with the foreign air and look of breeding that distinguished Mr. Heathcliff and his beautiful daughter-in-law. He also noticed the profound moroseness and ill-temper of everybody in the house. Overtaken by a snowstorm, he was, however, constrained to sleep there and was conducted by the housekeeper to an old chamber, long unused, where (since at first he could not sleep) he amused himself by looking over a few mildewed books piled on one corner of the window-ledge. They and the ledge were scrawled all over with writing, *Catharine Earnshaw*,

sometimes varied to *Catharine Heathcliff*, and again to *Catharine Linton*. Nothing save these three names was written on the ledge, but the books were covered in every fly-leaf and margin with a pen-and-ink commentary, a sort of diary, as it proved, scrawled in a childish hand. Mr. Lockwood spent the first portion of the night in deciphering this faded record; a string of childish mishaps and deficiencies dated a quarter of a century ago. Evidently this Catharine Earnshaw must have been one of Heathcliff's kin, for he figured in the narrative as her fellow-scapegrace, and the favourite scapegoat of her elder brother's wrath. After some time Mr. Lockwood fell asleep, to be troubled by harassing dreams, in one of which he fancied that this childish Catharine Earnshaw, or rather her spirit, was knocking and scratching at the fir-scraped window-pane, begging to be let in. Overcome with the intense horror of nightmare, he screamed aloud in his sleep. Waking suddenly up he found to his confusion that his yell had been heard, for Heathcliff appeared, exceedingly angry that any one had been allowed to sleep in the oak-closeted room.

"If the little fiend had got in at the window she probably would have strangled me," I returned. . . . "Catharine Linton or Earnshaw, or however she was called—she must have been a changeling, wicked little soul! She told me she had been walking the earth these twenty years; a just punishment for her mortal transgressions, I've no doubt.

"Scarcely were these words uttered when I recollected the association of Heathcliff's with Catharine's name in the books . . . . I blushed at my inconsideration—but, without showing further consciousness of the offence, I hastened to add, 'The truth is, sir, I passed the first part of the night in—.' Here I stopped afresh—I was

about to say 'perusing those old volumes,' then it would have revealed my knowledge of their written as well as their printed contents; so I went on, 'in spelling over the name scratched on that window-ledge: a monotonous occupation calculated to set me asleep, like counting, or—.' 'What *can* you mean by talking in this way to *me!*' thundered Heathcliff with savage vehemence. 'How—how *dare* you, under my roof? God! he's mad to speak so!' And he struck his forehead with rage.

"I did not know whether to resent this language or pursue my explanation; but he seemed so powerfully affected that I took pity and proceeded with my dreams . . . . Heathcliff gradually fell back into the shelter of the bed, as I spoke; finally sitting down almost concealed behind it. I guessed, however, by his irregular and intercepted breathing, that he struggled to vanquish an excess of violent emotion. Not liking to show him that I had heard the conflict, I continued my toilette rather noisily . . . . and soliloquised on the length of the night. 'Not three o'clock yet! I could have taken oath it had been six. Time stagnates here: we must surely have retired to rest at eight!'

"'Always at nine in winter, and rise at four,' said my host, suppressing a groan; and, as I fancied, by the motion of his arm's shadow, dashing a tear from his eyes. 'Mr. Lockwood,' he added, 'you may go into my room: you'll only be in the way, coming downstairs so early . . . . Take the candle and go where you please. I shall join you directly. Keep out of the yard, though, the dogs are unchained; and the house—Juno mounts sentinel there, and—nay, you can only ramble about the steps and passages. But, away with you! I'll come in two minutes.'

"I obeyed, so far as to quit the chamber; when, ignorant where the narrow lobbies led, I stood still, and was witness, involuntarily, to a piece of superstition on the part of my landlord which belied oddly his apparent sense. He got on to the bed, and wrenched open the lattice, bursting, as he pulled at it, into an uncontrollable passion of tears. 'Come in! come in!' he sobbed, 'Cathy, do come! Oh, my heart's darling! hear me *this* time, Catharine, at last!' The spectre showed a spectre's ordinary caprice: it gave no sign of being; but the snow and wind whirled wildly through, even reaching my station, and blowing out the light.

"There was such anguish in the gush of grief that accompanied this raving, that my compassion made me overlook its folly, and I drew off, half angry to have listened at all, and vexed at having related my ridiculous nightmare, since it produced that agony; though *why* was beyond my comprehension."

Mr. Lockwood got no clue to the mystery at 'Wuthering Heights'; and later on returned to Thrushcross Grange, to fall ill of a lingering fever. During his recovery he heard the history of his landlord, from his housekeeper, who had been formerly an occupant of 'Wuthering Heights,' and after that, for many years, the chief retainer at Thrushcross Grange, where young Mrs. Heathcliff used to live when she still was Catharine Linton.

"Do you know anything of Mr. Heathcliff's story?" said Mr. Lockwood to his housekeeper, Nelly Dean.

"It's a cuckoo's, sir," she answered.

It is at this point that the history of 'Wuthering Heights' commences, that violent and bitter history of the "little dark thing harboured by a good man to his bane," carried over the threshold, as Christabel lifted

Geraldine, out of pity for the weakness which, having grown strong, shall crush the hand that helped it; carried over the threshold, as evil spirits are carried, powerless to enter of themselves, and yet no evil demon, only a human soul lost and blackened by tyranny, injustice and congenital ruin. The story of 'Wuthering Heights,' is the story of Heathcliff. It begins with the sudden journey of the old squire, Mr. Earnshaw, to Liverpool one summer morning at the beginning of harvest. He had asked the children each to choose a present, "only let it be little, for I shall walk there and back, sixty miles each way:" and the son Hindley, a proud, high-spirited lad of fourteen, had chosen a fiddle; six-year-old Cathy, a whip, for she could ride any horse in the stable; and Nelly Dean, their humble playfellow and runner of errands, had been promised a pocketful of apples and pears. It was the third night since Mr. Earnshaw's departure, and the children, sleepy and tired, had begged their mother to let them sit up a little longer—yet a little longer—to welcome their father, and see their new presents. At last—just about eleven o'clock—Mr. Earnshaw came back, laughing and groaning over his fatigue; and opening his greatcoat, which he held bundled up in his arms, he cried:

"'See here, wife! I was never so beaten with anything in my life: but you must e'en take it as a gift of God; though it's as dark almost as if it came from the devil."

"We crowded round, and over Miss Cathy's head I had a peep at a dirty, ragged, black-haired child; big enough both to walk and talk; indeed, its face looked older than Catharine's; yet, when it was set on its feet, it only stared round and repeated over and over again some gibberish that nobody could understand. I was frightened, and Mrs. Earnshaw was ready to fling it out

of doors: she did fly up, asking how he could fashion to bring that gipsy brat into the house when they had their own bairns to feed and fend for? What he meant to do with it, and whether he were mad? The master tried to explain the matter; but he was really half dead with fatigue, and all that I could make out, amongst her scolding, was a tale of his seeing it starving and houseless, and as good as dumb, in the streets of Liverpool, where he picked it up and inquired for its owner. Not a soul knew to whom it belonged, he said; and his money and time being both limited, he thought it better to take it home with him at once, than run into vain expenses there; because he was determined he would not leave it as he found it."

So the child entered 'Wuthering Heights,' a cause of dissension from the first. Mrs. Earnshaw grumbled herself calm; the children went to bed crying, for the fiddle had been broken and the whip lost in carrying the little stranger for so many miles. But Mr. Earnshaw was determined to have his *protégé* respected; he cuffed saucy little Cathy for making faces at the new comer, and turned Nelly Dean out of the house for having set him to sleep on the stairs because the children would not have him in their bed. And when she ventured to return some days afterwards, she found the child adopted into the family, and called by the name of a son who had died in childhood—Heathcliff.

Nevertheless, he had no enviable position. Cathy, indeed, was very thick with him, and the master had taken to him strangely, believing every word he said, "for that matter he said precious little, and generally the truth," but Mrs. Earnshaw disliked the little interloper and never interfered in his behalf when Hindley, who hated him, thrashed and struck the sullen, patient child,

who never complained, but bore all his bruises in silence. This endurance made old Earnshaw furious when he discovered the persecutions to which this mere baby was subjected; the child soon discovered it to be a most efficient instrument of vengeance.

"I remember Mr. Earnshaw once bought a couple of colts at the parish fair, and gave the lads each one. Heathcliff took the handsomest, but it soon fell lame, and when he discovered it, he said to Hindley: 'You must exchange horses with me, I don't like mine; and if you don't I shall tell your father of the three thrashings you've given me this week, and show him my arm which is black to the shoulder.' Hindley put out his tongue, and cuffed him over the ears. 'You'd better do it at once,' he persisted, escaping to the porch (they were in the stable). 'You'll have to; and if I speak of these blows you'll get them back with interest.' 'Off, dog!' cried Hindley, threatening him with an iron weight, used for weighing potatoes and hay. 'Throw it,' he replied, standing still, 'and then I'll tell how you boasted you would turn me out of doors as soon as he died, and see whether he will not turn you out directly.' Hindley threw it, hitting him on the breast, and down he fell, but staggered up immediately, breathless and white; and had not I prevented it, he would have gone just so to the master and got full revenge by letting his condition plead for him, intimating who had caused it. 'Take my colt, gipsy, then,' said young Earnshaw. 'And I pray that he may break your neck; take him and be damned, you beggarly interloper! and wheedle my father out of all he has: only afterwards show him what you are, imp of Satan. And take that; I hope he'll kick out your brains!'

"Heatheliff had gone to loose the beast and shift it to

his own stall; he was passing behind it when Hindley finished his speech by knocking him under its feet, and, without stopping to examine whether his hopes were fulfilled, ran away as fast as he could. I was surprised to witness how coolly the child gathered himself up and went on with his intention; exchanging saddles and all, and then sitting down on a bundle of hay to overcome the qualm which the violent blow occasioned, before he entered the house. I persuaded him easily to let me lay the blame of his bruises on the horse: he heeded little what tale was told so that he had what he wanted. He complained so seldom, indeed, of such things as these that I really thought him not vindictive; I was deceived completely, as you will hear."

So the division grew. This malignant, uncomplaining child, with foreign skin and Eastern soul, could only breed discord in that Yorkshire home. He could not understand what was honourable by instinct to an English mind. He was quick to take an advantage, long-suffering, sly, nursing his revenge in silence like a vindictive slave, until at last the moment of retribution should be his; sufficiently truthful and brave to have grown noble in another atmosphere, but with a ready bent to underhand and brooding vengeance. Insensible, it seemed, to gratitude. Proud with the unreasoning pride of an Oriental; cruel, and violently passionate. One soft and tender speck there was in this dark and sullen heart; it was an exceedingly great and forbearing love for the sweet, saucy, naughty Catharine.

But this one affection only served to augment the mischief that he wrought. He who had estranged son from father, husband from wife, severed brother from sister as completely; for Hindley hated the swarthy child who was Cathy's favourite companion. When

Mrs. Earnshaw died, two years after Heathcliff's advent, Hindley had learned to regard his father as an oppressor rather than a friend, and Heathcliff as an intolerable usurper. So, from the very beginning, he bred bad feeling in the house.

In the course of time Mr. Earnshaw began to fail. His strength suddenly left him, and he grew half childish, irritable, and extremely jealous of his authority. He considered any slight to Heathcliff as a slight to his own discretion; so that, in the master's presence, the child was deferred to and courted from respect for that master's weakness, while, behind his back, the old wrongs, the old hatred, showed themselves unquenched. And so the child grew up bitter and distrustful. Matters got a little better for a while, when the untameable Hindley was sent to college; yet still there was disturbance and disquiet, for Mr. Earnshaw did not love his daughter Catharine, and his heart was yet further embittered by the grumbling and discontent of old Joseph the servant; the wearisomest "self-righteous Pharisee that ever ransacked a Bible to take the promises to himself and fling the curses to his neighbours." But Catharine, though slighted for Heathcliff, and nearly always in trouble on his account, was much too fond of him to be jealous. "The greatest punishment we could invent for her was to keep her separate from Heathcliff. . . . . Certainly she had ways with her such as I never saw a child take up before; and she put all of us past our patience fifty times and oftener in a day; from the hour she came downstairs till the hour she went to bed, we hadn't a minute's security that she wouldn't be in mischief. Her spirits were always at high-watermark, her tongue always going—singing, laughing, and plaguing everybody who would not do the same. A wild, wicked slip

she was; but she had the bonniest eye, the sweetest smile, and the lightest foot in the parish. And after all, I believe, she meant no harm; for, when once she made you cry in good earnest, it seldom happened that she wouldn't keep your company and oblige you to be quiet that you might comfort her. In play she liked exceedingly to act the little mistress, using her hands freely and commanding her companions."

Suddenly this pretty, mischievous sprite was left fatherless; Mr. Earnshaw died quietly, sitting in his chair by the fireside one October evening. Mr. Hindley, now a young man of twenty, came home to the funeral, to the great astonishment of the household bringing a wife with him.

A rush of a lass, spare and bright-eyed, with a changing, hectic colour, hysterical, and full of fancies, fickle as the winds, now flighty and full of praise and laughter, now peevish and languishing. For the rest, the very idol of her husband's heart. A word from her, a passing phrase of dislike for Heathcliff, was enough to revive all young Earnshaw's former hatred of the boy. Heathcliff was turned out of their society, no longer allowed to share Cathy's lessons, degraded to the position of an ordinary farm-servant. At first Heathcliff did not mind. Cathy taught him what she learned, and played or worked with him in the fields. Cathy ran wild with him, and had a share in all his scrapes; they both bade fair to grow up regular little savages, while Hindley Earnshaw kissed and fondled his young wife utterly heedless of their fate.

An adventure suddenly changed the course of their lives. One Sunday evening Cathy and Heathcliff ran down to Thrushcross Grange to peep through the windows and see how the little Lintons spent their

Sundays. They looked in, and saw Isabella at one end of the, to them, splendid drawing-room, and Edgar at the other, both in floods of tears, peevishly quarrelling. So elate were the two little savages from Wuthering Heights at this proof of their neighbours' inferiority, that they burst into peals of laughter. The little Lintons were terrified, and, to frighten them still more, Cathy and Heathcliff made a variety of frightful noises; they succeeded in terrifying not only the children but their silly parents, who imagined the yells to come from a gang of burglars, determined on robbing the house. They let the dogs loose, in this belief, and the bulldog seized Cathy's bare little ankle, for she had lost her shoes in the bog. While Heathcliff was trying to throttle off the brute, the man-servant came up, and, taking both the children prisoner, conveyed them into the lighted hall. There, to the humiliation and surprise of the Lintons, the lame little vagrant was discovered to be Miss Earnshaw, and her fellow-misdemeanant, "that strange acquisition my late neighbour made in his journey to Liverpool—a little Lascar, or an American or Spanish castaway."

Cathy stayed five weeks at Thrushcross Grange, by which time her ankle was quite well, and her manners much improved. Young Mrs. Earnshaw had tried her best, during this visit, to endeavour by a judicious mixture of fine clothes and flattery to raise the standard of Cathy's self-respect. She went home, then, a beautiful and finely-dressed young lady, to find Heathcliff in equal measure deteriorated; the mere farm-servant, whose clothes were soiled with three months' service in mire and dust, with unkempt hair and grimy face and hands.

"'Heathcliff, you may come forward,' cried Mr. Hindley, enjoying his discomfiture, and gratified to see what a forbidding young blackguard he would be compelled to

present himself. 'You may come and wish Miss Catharine welcome, like the other servants.' Cathy, catching a glimpse of her friend in his concealment, flew to embrace him, she bestowed seven or eight kisses on his cheek within the second, and then stopped, and, drawing back, burst into a laugh, exclaiming: 'Why, how very black and cross you look! and how—how funny and grim! But that's because I'm used to Edgar and Isabella Linton.'

"'Well, Heathcliff, have you forgotten me? Shake hands, Heathcliff,' said Mr. Earnshaw, condescendingly, 'once in a way, that is permitted.'

"'I shall not,' replied the boy, finding his tongue at last. 'I shall not stand to be laughed at. I shall not bear it.'"

From this time Catharine's friendship with Heathcliff was chequered by intermittent jealousy on his side and intermittent disgust upon hers; and for this evil turn, far more than for any coarser brutality, Heathcliff longed for revenge on Hindley Earnshaw. Meanwhile Edgar Linton, greatly smitten with the beautiful Catharine, went from time to time to visit at Wuthering Heights. He would have gone far oftener, but that he had a terror of Hindley Earnshaw's reputation, and shrank from encountering him.

For this fine young Oxford gentleman, this proud young husband, was sinking into worse excesses than any of his wild Earnshaw ancestors. A defiant sorrow had driven him to desperation. In the summer following Catharine's visit to Thushcross Grange, his only son and heir had been born. An occasion of great rejoicings, suddenly dashed by the discovery that his wife, his idol, was fast sinking in consumption. Hindley refused to believe it, and his wife kept her flighty spirits till the

end; but one night, while leaning on his shoulder, a fit of coughing took her—a very slight one. She put her two hands about his neck, her face changed, and she was dead.

Hindley grew desperate, and gave himself over to wild companions, to excesses of dissipation, and tyranny. "His treatment of Heathcliff was enough to make a fiend of a saint." Heathcliff bore it with sullen patience, as he had borne the blows and kicks of his childhood, turning them into a lever for extorting advantages; the aches and wants of his body were redeemed by a fierce joy at heart, for in this degradation of Hindley Earnshaw he recognised the instrument of his own revenge.

Time went on, ever making a sharper difference between this gipsy hind and his beautiful young mistress; time went on, leaving the two fast friends enough, but leaving also in the heart of Heathcliff a passionate rancour against the man who, of set purpose, had made him unworthy of Catharine's hand, and of the other man on whom it was to be bestowed.

For Edgar Linton was infatuated with the naughty, tricksy young beauty of Wuthering Heights. Her violent temper did not frighten him, although his own character was singularly sweet, placid and feeble; her compromising friendship with such a mere boor as young Heathcliff was only a trifling annoyance easily to be excused. And when his own father and mother died of a fever caught in nursing her he did not love her less for the sorrow she brought. A fever she had wilfully taken in despair, and a sudden sickness of life. One evening pretty Cathy came into the kitchen to tell Nelly Dean that she had engaged herself to marry Edgar Linton. Heathcliff, unseen, was seated on the other side the settle, on a bench by the wall, quite hidden from those at the fireside.

Cathy was very elated, but not at all happy. Edgar was rich, handsome, young, gentle, passionately in love with her; still she was miserable. Nelly Dean, who was nursing the baby Hareton by the fire, finally grew out of patience with her whimsical discontent.

"'Your brother will be pleased,'" she said; "'the old lady and gentleman will not object, I think; you will escape from a disorderly, comfortless home into a wealthy, respectable one; and you love Edgar, and Edgar loves you. All seems smooth and easy; where is the obstacle?'

"'*Here!* and here!' replied Catharine, striking one hand on her forehead and the other on her breast. 'In whichever place the soul lives. In my soul and in my heart I'm convinced I'm wrong.'

"'That's very strange. I cannot make it out.'

"'It's my secret. But if you will not mock at me, I'll explain it. I can't do it distinctly; but I'll give you a feeling of how I feel.'

"'She seated herself by me again; her countenance grew sadder and graver, and her clasped hands trembled.

"'Nelly, do you never dream queer dreams?' she said, suddenly, after some minutes' reflection.

"'Yes, now and then,' I answered.

"'And so do I. I've dreamt in my life dreams that have stayed with me ever after, and changed my ideas; they've gone through and through me like wine through water, and altered the colour of my mind. And this is one: I'm going to tell it, but take care not to smile at any part of it.'

"'Oh, don't, Miss Catharine,' I cried. 'We're dismal enough without conjuring up ghosts and visions to perplex us . . . .'

"She was vexed, but she did not proceed. Apparently

taking up another subject, she recommenced in a short time.

"'If I were in heaven, Nelly, I should be extremely miserable.'

"'Because you are not fit to go there,' I answered; 'all sinners would be miserable in heaven.'

"'But it is not that. I dreamt once that I was there.'

"'I tell you, I won't hearken to your dreams, Miss Catharine. I'll go to bed,' I interrupted again.

"She laughed, and held me down, for I made a motion to leave my chair.

"'This is nothing,' cried she; 'I was only going to say that heaven did not seem to be any home; and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights, where I woke sobbing for joy. That will do to explain my secret as well as the other. I've no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven; and, if the wicked man in there hadn't brought Heathcliff so low, I shouldn't have thought of it. It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now, so he shall never know how I love him; and that, not because he's handsome, Nelly but because he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same; and Linton's is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire.'

"Ere this speech ended I became sensible of Heathcliff's presence. Having noticed a slight movement, I turned my head, and saw him rise from the bench and steal out noiselessly. He had listened till he had heard Catharine say that it would degrade her to marry him, and then he stayed to hear no further. My companion, sitting on the ground, was prevented by the back of the

settle from remarking his presence or departure; but I started, and bade her hush.

"'Why?' she asked, gazing nervously round.

"'Joseph is here,' I answered, catching opportunely the roll of his cart-wheels up the road, 'and Heathcliff will be coming in with him. . . . . Unfortunate creature, as soon as you become Mrs. Linton he loses friend and love and all. Have you considered how you'll bear the separation, and how he'll bear to be quite deserted in the world? Because, Miss Catharine . . . .'

"'He quite deserted! we separated!' she exclaimed, with an accent of indignation. 'Who is to separate us, pray! They'll meet the fate of Milo. Not as long as I live, Ellen; for no mortal creature. Every Linton on the face of the earth might melt into nothing, before I could consent to forsake Heathcliff . . . . My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff's miseries, and I watched and felt each from the beginning. My great thought in living is himself. If all else perished, and *he* remained, *I* should still continue to be; and if all else remained and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger: I should not seem a part of it. My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath; a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I am Heathcliff. He's always, always in my mind: not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being. So don't talk of our separation again; it is impracticable; and ——'

"She paused, and hid her face in the folds of my gown; but I jerked it forcibly away. I was out of patience with her folly."

Poor Cathy! beautiful, haughty, and capricious; who should guide and counsel her? her besotted, drunken brother? the servant who did not love her and was impatient of her weathercock veerings? No. And Heathcliff, who, brutalised and rude as he was, at least did love and understand her? Heathcliff, who had walked out of the house, her rejection burning in his ears, not to enter it till he was fitted to exact both love and vengeance. He did not come back that night, though the thunder rattled and the rain streamed over Wuthering Heights; though Cathy, shawl-less in the wind and wet, stood calling him through the violent storms that drowned and baffled her cries.

All night she would not leave the hearth, but lay on the settle sobbing and moaning, all soaked as she was, with her hands on her face and her face to the wall. A strange augury for her marriage, these first dreams of her affianced love—not dreams, indeed, but delirium; for the next morning she was burning and tossing in fever, near to death's door as it seemed.

But she won through, and Edgar's parents carried her home to nurse. As we know, they took the infection and died within a few days of each other. Nor was this the only ravage that the fever made. Catharine, always hasty and fitful in temper, was henceforth subject at rare intervals to violent and furious rages, which threatened her life and reason by their extremity. The doctor said she ought not to be crossed; she ought to have her own way, and it was nothing less than murder in her eyes for any one to presume to stand up and contradict her. But the strained temper, the spoiled, authoritative ways, the saucy caprices of his bride, were no blemishes in Edgar Linton's eyes. "He was infatuated, and believed himself the happiest man alive on the day he led

her to Gimmerton Chapel three years subsequent to his father's death."

Despite so many gloomy auguries the marriage was a happy one at first. Catharine was petted and humoured by every one, with Edgar for a perpetual worshipper; his pretty, weak-natured sister Isabella as an admiring companion; and for the necessary spectator of her happiness, Nelly Dean, who had been induced to quit her nursling at Wuthering Heights.

Suddenly Heathcliff returned, not the old Heathcliff, but a far more dangerous enemy, a tall, athletic, well-formed man, intelligent, and severe. "A half-civilised ferocity lurked yet in the depressed brows and eyes, full of black fire, but it was subdued; and his manner was even dignified, though too stern for grace." A formidable rival for boyish Edgar Linton, with his only son's petulance, constitutional timidity, and weak health. Cathy, though she was really attached to her husband, gave him cruel pain by her undisguised and childish delight at Heathcliff's return; he had a presentiment that evil would come of the old friendship thus revived, and would willingly have forbidden Heathcliff the house; but Edgar, so anxious lest any cross be given to his wife, with a double reason then for tenderly guarding her health, could not inflict a serious sorrow upon her with only a baseless jealousy for its excuse. Thus, Heathcliff became intimate at Thrushcross Grange, the second house to which he was made welcome, the second hearth he meant to ruin. At this time he was lodging at Wuthering Heights. On his return he had first intended, he told Catharine, "just to have one glimpse of your face, a stare of surprise, perhaps, and pretended pleasure; afterwards settle my score with Hindley; and then prevent the law by doing execution on myself."

Catharine's welcome changed this plan; her brother was safe from Heathcliff's violence; but not from his hate. The score was being settled in a different fashion. Hindley—who was eager to get money for his gambling and who had drunk his wits away—was only too glad to take Heathcliff as lodger, boon-companion, and fellow card-player at once. And Heathcliff was content to wait and take his revenge sip by sip, encouraging his old oppressor in drink and gaming, watching him lose acre after acre of his land, knowing that sooner or later Earnshaw would lose everything, and he, Heathcliff, be master of Wuthering Heights, with Hindley's son for his servant. Revenge is sweet. Meanwhile, Wuthering Heights was a handy lodging, at walking distance from the Grange.

But soon his visits were cut off. Isabella Linton—a charming girl of eighteen with an *espiègle* face and a thin sweetness of disposition that could easily turn sour—Isabella Linton fell in love with Heathcliff. To do him justice he had never dreamed of marrying her, until one day Catharine, in a fit of passion, revealed the poor girl's secret. Heathcliff pretended not to believe her, but Isabel was her brother's heir, and to marry her, inherit Edgar's money, and ill-use his sister, would, indeed, be a fair revenge on Catharine's husband.

At first it was merely as an artistically pleasurable idea, a castle in the air, to be dreamed about, not built, that this scheme suggested itself to Heathcliff. But one day, when he had been detected in an experimental courting of Isabel, Edgar Linton, glad of an excuse, turned him out of doors. Then, in a paroxysm of hatred, never-satisfied revenge, and baffled passion, Heathcliff struck with the poisoned weapon ready to his hand. He persuaded Isabel to run away with him—no difficult task—and they eloped together one night to be married.

Isabella—poor, weak, romantic, sprightly Isabel—was not missed at first; for very terrible trouble had fallen upon the Grange. Catharine, in a paroxysm of rage at the dismissal of Heathcliff, quarrelled violently with Edgar, and shut herself up in her own room. For three days and nights she remained there, eating nothing; Edgar, secluded in his study, expecting every moment that she would come down and ask his forgiveness; Nelly Dean, who alone knew of her determined starving, resolved to say nothing about it, and conquer, once for all, the haughty and passionate spirit which possessed her beautiful young mistress.

So three days went by. Catharine still refused all her food, and unsympathetic Ellen still resolved to let her starve, if she chose, without a remonstrance. On the third day Catharine unbarred her door and asked for food; and now Ellen Dean was too frightened to exult. Her mistress was wasted, haggard, wild, as if by months of illness; the too-presumptuous servant remembered the doctor's warning, and dreaded her master's anger, when he should discover Catharine's real condition.

On this servant's obstinate cold-heartedness rests the crisis of 'Wuthering Heights;' had Ellen Dean, at the first, attempted to console the violent, childish Catharine, had she acquainted Edgar of the real weakness underneath her pride, Catharine would have had no fatal illness and left no motherless child; and had moping Isabel, instead of being left to weep alone about the park and garden, been conducted to her sister's room and shown a real sickness to nurse, a real misery to mend, she would not have gone away with Heathcliff, and wedded herself to sorrow, out of a fanciful love in idleness. It is characteristic of Emily Brontë's genius that she should

choose so very simple and homely a means for the production of most terrible results.

A fit she had had alone and untended during those three days of isolated starvation had unsettled Catharine's reason. The gradual coming-on of her delirium is given with a masterly pathos that Webster need not have made more strong, nor Fletcher more lovely and appealing:—

"A minute previously she was violent; now, supported on one arm and not noticing my refusal to obey her, she seemed to find childish diversion in pulling the feathers from the rents she had just made in the pillows and ranging them on the sheet according to their different species: her mind had strayed to other associations.

"'That's a turkey's,' she murmured to herself, 'and this is a wild duck's, and this is a pigeon's. Ah, they put pigeons' feathers in the pillows—no wonder I couldn't die! Let me take care to throw it on the floor when I lie down. And here is a moorcock's; and this—I should know it among a thousand—it's a lapwing's. Bonny bird; wheeling over our heads in the middle of the moor. It wanted to get to its nest, for the clouds had touched the swells, and it felt rain coming. This feather was picked up from the heath, the bird was not shot: we saw its nest in the winter, full of little skeletons. Heathcliff set a trap over it and the old ones dare not come. I made him promise he'd never shoot a lapwing after that, and he didn't. Yes, here are more! Did he shoot my lapwings, Nelly? Are they red, any of them? Let me look.'

"'Give over with that baby-work!' I interrupted, dragging the pillow away, and turning the holes towards the mattress, for she was removing its contents by hand-

fuls. 'Lie down and shut your eyes: you're wandering. There's a mess! The down is flying about like snow.'

"I went here and there collecting it.

"'I see in you, Nelly,' she continued, dreamily, 'an aged woman: you have grey hair and bent shoulders. This bed is the fairy cave under Peniston Crag, and you are gathering elf-bolts to hurt our heifers; pretending while I am near that they are only locks of wool. That's what you'll come to fifty years hence: I know you are not so now. I'm not wandering; you're mistaken, or else I should believe you really *were* that withered hag, and I should think I *was* under Peniston Crag; and I'm conscious it's night, and there are two candles on the table making the black press shine like jet.'

"'The black press? Where is that?' I asked. 'You are talking in your sleep.'

"'It's against the wall as it always is,' she replied. 'It *does* appear odd. I see a face in it!'

"'There's no press in the room and never was,' said I, resuming my seat, and looping up the curtain that I might watch her.

"'Don't *you* see that face?' she inquired, gazing earnestly at the mirror.

"And say what I could I was incapable of making her comprehend it to be her own; so I rose and covered it with a shawl.

"'It's behind there still!' she pursued, anxiously, 'and it stirred. Who is it? I hope it will not come out when you are gone. Oh, Nelly! the room is haunted! I'm afraid of being alone.'

"I took her hand in mine, and bid her be composed, for a succession of shudders convulsed her frame, and she would keep straining her gaze towards the glass.

"'There's nobody here!' I insisted. 'It was *yourself* Mrs. Linton: you knew it a while since.'

"'Myself!' she gasped, 'and the clock is striking twelve. It's true then! that's dreadful.'

"Her fingers clutched the clothes, and gathered them over her eyes."

This scene was the beginning of a long and fearful brain-fever, from which, owing to her husband's devoted and ceaseless care, Catharine recovered her life, but barely her reason. That hung in the balance, a touch might settle it on the side of health or of madness. Not until the beginning of this fever was Isabella's flight discovered. Her brother was too concerned with his wife's illness to feel as heart-broken as Heathcliff hoped. He was not violent against his sister, nor even angry; only, with the mild steady persistence of his nature, he refused to hold any communication with Heathcliff's wife. But when, at the beginning of Catharine's recovery, Ellen Dean received a letter from Isabella, declaring the extreme wretchedness of her life at Wuthering Heights, where Heathcliff was master now, Edgar Linton willingly accorded the servant permission to go and see his sister.

Arrived at Wuthering Heights, she found that once plentiful homestead sorely ruined and deteriorated by years of thriftless dissipation; and Isabella Linton, already metamorphosed into a wan and listless slattern, broken-spirited and pale. As a pleasant means of entertaining his wife and her old servant, Heathcliff discoursed on his love for Catharine and on his conviction that she could not really care for Edgar Linton.

"'Catharine has a heart as deep as I have: the sea could be as readily contained in that horse-trough, as her whole affection monopolised by him. Tush! He is scarcely a degree dearer to her than her dog or her

horse. It is not in him to be loved like me. How can she love in him what he has not?'"

Nelly Dean, unhindered by the sight of Isabella's misery, or by the memory of the wrongs her master already suffered from this estimable neighbour, was finally cajoled into taking a letter from him to the frail half-dying Catharine, appointing an interview. For Heathcliff persisted that he had no wish to make a disturbance, or to exasperate Mr. Linton, but merely to see his old playfellow again, to learn from her own lips how she was, and whether in anything he could serve her.

The letter was taken and given; the meeting came about one Sunday when all the household save Ellen Dean were at church. Catharine, pale, apathetic, but more than ever beautiful in her mazed weakness of mind and body; Heathcliff, violent in despair, seeing death in her face, alternately upbraiding her fiercely for causing him so much misery, and tenderly caressing the altered. dying face. Never was so strange a love scene. It is not a scene to quote, not noticeable for its eloquent passages or the beauty of casual phrases, but for its sustained passion, desperate, pure, terrible. It must be read in its sequence and its entirety. Nor can I think of any parting more terrible, more penetrating in its anguish than this. Romeo and Juliet part; but they have known each other but for a week. There is no scene that Heathcliff can look upon in which he has not played with Catharine: and, now that she is dying, he must not watch with her. Troilus and Cressida part; but Cressida is false, and Troilus has his country left him. What country has Heathcliff, the outcast, nameless, adventurer? Antonio and his Duchess; but they have belonged to each other and been happy; these two are eternally separate. Their passion is only heightened by

its absolute freedom from desire; even the wicked and desperate Heathcliff has no ignoble love for Catharine; all he asks is that she live, and that he may see her; that she may be happy even if it be with Linton. "I would never have banished him from her society, while she desired his," asserts Heathcliff, and now she is mad with grief and dying. The consciousness of their strained and thwarted natures, moreover, makes us the more regretful they must sever. Had he survived, Romeo would have been happy with Rosalind, after all; probably Juliet would have married Paris. But where will Heathcliff love again, the perverted, morose, brutalised Heathcliff, whose only human tenderness has been his love for the capricious, lively, beautiful young creature, now dazed, now wretched, now dying in his arms? The very remembrance of his violence and cruelty renders more awful the spectacle of this man, sitting with his dying love, silent; their faces hid against each other, and washed by each other's tears.

At last they parted: Catharine unconscious, half-dead. That night her puny, seven-months' child was born; that night the mother died, unutterably changed from the bright imperious creature who entered that house as a kingdom, not yet a year ago. By her side, in the darkened chamber, her husband lay, worn out with anguish. Outside, dashing his head against the trees in a Berserker-wrath with fate, Heathcliff raged, not to be consoled.

"'Her senses never returned: she recognised nobody from the time you left her,' I said. 'She lies with a sweet smile upon her face, and her latest ideas wandered back to pleasant early days. Her life closed in a gentle dream—may she wake as kindly in the other world!'

"'May she wake in torment!' he cried, with frightful

vehemence, stamping his foot and groaning in a paroxysm of ungovernable passion. 'Why, she's a liar to the end! Where is she? Not *there*—not in heaven—not perished—where? Oh! you said you cared nothing for my sufferings. And I pray one prayer. I repeat it till my tongue stiffens. Catharine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living. You said I killed you—haunt me then! The murdered do haunt their murderers, I believe. I know that ghosts *have* wandered on earth. Be with me always—take any form—drive me mad! only *do* not leave me in this abyss where I cannot find you! Oh, God, it is unutterable! I *cannot* live without my life. I *cannot* live without my soul.'

"He dashed his head against the knotted trunk; and, lifting up his eyes, howled, not like a man, but like a savage beast being goaded to death with knives and spears. I observed several splashes of blood about the bark of the tree, and his hand and forehead were both stained; probably the scene I witnessed was the repetition of others acted during the night. It hardly moved my compassion, it appalled me."

From this time a slow insidious madness worked in Heathcliff. When it was at its height he was not fierce, but strangely silent, scarcely breathing; hushed, as a person who draws his breath to hear some sound only just not heard as yet, as a man who strains his eyes to see the speck on the horizon which will rise the next moment, the next instant, and grow into the ship that brings his treasure home. "When I sat in the house with Hareton, it seemed that on going out I should meet her; when I walked on the moors, I should meet her coming in. When I went from home, I hastened to return; she *must* be somewhere at the Heights I was certain; and when I slept in her chamber—I was beaten out of that. I

couldn't lie there; for the moment I closed my eyes, she was either outside the window, or sliding back the panels, or entering the room, or even resting her darling head on the same pillow, as she did when a child; and I must open my lids to see. And so I opened and closed them a hundred times a night to be always disappointed. It was a strange way of killing, not by inches, but by fractions of hairbreadths, to beguile me with the spectre of a hope through eighteen years." This mania of expectation stretching the nerves to their uttermost strain, relaxed sometimes; and then Heathcliff was dangerous. When filled with the thought of Catharine, the world was indifferent to him; but when this possessing memory abated ever so little, he remembered that the world was his enemy, had cheated him of Catharine. Then avarice, ambition, revenge, entered into his soul, and his last state was worse than his first. Cruel, with the insane cruelty, the bloodmania of an Ezzelin, he never was; his cruelties had a purpose, the sufferings of the victims were a detail not an end. Yet something of that despot's character, refined into torturing the mind and not the flesh, chaste, cruel, avaricious of power, something of that Southern morbidness in crime, distinguishes Heathcliff from the villains of modern English tragedies. Placed in the Italian Renaissance, with Cyril Tourneur for a chronicler, Heathcliff would not have awakened the outburst of incredulous indignation which greeted his appearance in a nineteenth century romance.

Soon after the birth of the younger Catharine, Isabella Heathcliff escaped from her husband to the South of England. He made no attempt to follow her, and in her new home she gave birth to a son, Linton—the fruit of timidity and hatred, fear and revulsion—"from the

first she reported him to 'be an ailing, peevish creature." Meanwhile little Catharine grew up the very light of her home, an exquisite creature with her father's gentle, constant nature inspired by a spark of her mother's fire and lightened by a gleam of her wayward caprice. She had the Earnshaws' handsome dark eyes and the Lintons' fair skin, regular features and curling yellow hair. "That capacity for intense attachments reminded me of her mother. Still she did not resemble her; her anger was never furious; her love never fierce; it was deep and tender." Cathy was in truth a charming creature, though less passionate and strange a nature than Catharine Earnshaw, not made to be loved as wildly nor as deeply mistrusted.

Edgar, grown a complete hermit, devoted himself to his child, who spent a life as happy and secluded as a princess in a fairy story, seldom venturing outside the limits of the park and never by herself. Edgar had never forgotten his sorrow for the death of his young wife; he loved her memory with steady constancy. If—and I think we may—if we allow that every author has some especial quality with which, in more or less degree, he endows all his children—if we grant that Shakespeare's people are all meditative, even the sprightly Rosalind and the clownish Dogberry—if we allow that all our acquaintances in Dickens are a trifle self-conscious, in George Eliot conscientious to such an extent that even Tito Melema feels remorse for conduct which, granted his period and his character, would more naturally have given him satisfaction—then we must allow that Emily Brontë's special mark is constancy. Passionate, insane constancy in Heathcliff; perverse, but intense in the elder Catharine; steady and holy in Edgar Linton; even the hard and narrow Ellen Dean; even Joseph, the hypocritical

Pharisee, are constant until death. Wild Hindley Earnshaw drinks himself to death for grief at losing his consumptive wife; Hareton loves to the end the man who has usurped his place, degraded him, fed him on blows and exaction: and it is constancy in absence that embitters and sickens the younger Catharine. Even Isabella Heathcliff, weak as she is, is not fickle. Even Linton Heathcliff, who, of all the characters in fiction, may share with Barnes Newcome the bad eminence of supreme unlovableness, even he loves his mother and Catharine, and, in his selfish way, loves them to the end.

The years passed, nothing happened, save that Hindley Earnshaw died, and Heathcliff—to whom every yard had been mortgaged, took possession of the place; Hareton, who should have been the first gentleman in the neighbourhood, "being reduced to a state of complete dependence on his father's inveterate enemy, lives as a servant in his own house, deprived of the advantages of wages quite unable to right himself because of his friendlessness, and his ignorance that he has been wronged."

The eventless years went by till Catharine was thirteen, when Mrs. Heathcliff died, and Edgar went to the South of England to fetch her son. Little Cathy, during her father's absence, grew impatient of her confinement to the park; there was no one to escort her over the moors, so one day she leapt the fence, got lost, and was finally sheltered at Wuthering Heights, of which place and of all its inmates she had been kept in total ignorance. She promised to keep the visit a secret from her father, lest he should dismiss Ellen Dean. She was very indignant at being told that rudely-bred Hareton was her cousin; and when that night Linton—delicate, pretty, pettish Linton—arrived, she infinitely preferred his cousinship.

The next morning she found Linton gone, his father

having sent for him to Wuthering Heights; Edgar Linton, however, did not tell his daughter that her cousin was so near, he would not for worlds she should cross the threshold of that terrible house. But one day, Cathy and Ellen Dean met Heathcliff on the moors, and he half persuaded, half forced them to come home and see his son, grown a most despicable, puling, ailing creature, half-violent, half-terrified. Cathy's kind little heart did not see the faults, she only saw that her cousin was ill, unhappy, in need of her; she was easily entrapped, one winter, when her father and Ellen Dean were both ill, into a secret engagement with this boy-cousin, the only lad, save uncouth Hareton, whom she had ever seen.

Every night, when her day's nursing was done, she rode over to Wuthering Heights to pet and fondle Linton. Heathcliff did all he could to favour the plan. He knew his son was dying, notwithstanding that every care was taken to preserve the heir of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. It is true that Cathy had a rival claim; to marry her to Linton would be to secure the title, get a wife for his dying son to preserve the line of inheritance, and certainly to break Edgar Linton's heart. Heathcliff's love of revenge and love of power combined to make the scheme a thing to strive for and desire.

He grew desperate as the boy got weaker and weaker; it was but too likely that he would die before his dying uncle, and, if Edgar Linton survived, Thrushcross Grange was lost to Heathcliff. As a last resource he made his son write to Edgar Linton and beg for an interview on neutral ground. Edgar, who, ignorant of Linton Heathcliff's true character, saw no reason why Cathy should not marry her cousin if they loved each other, allowed Ellen Dean to take her little mistress, now seventeen years old, on to the moors where Linton

Heathcliff was to meet them. Cathy was loath to leave her father even for an hour, he was so ill; but she had been told Linton was dying, so nerved herself to go once more on the moors: they found Linton in a strange state, terrified, exhausted, despondent, making spasmodic love to Cathy as if it were a lesson he had been beaten into learning. She wished to return, but the boy declared himself, and looked, too ill to go back alone. They escorted him home to the Heights, and Heathcliff persuaded them to enter, saying he would go for a doctor for his sick lad. But, once they were in the house, he showed his hand. The doors were bolted; the servants and Hareton away. Neither tears nor prayers would induce him to let his victims go till Catharine was Linton's wife, and so, he told her, till her father had died in solitude. But five days after, Catharine Linton, now Catharine Heathcliff, contrived an escape in time to console her father's dying hours with a false belief in her happiness; a noble lie, for Edgar Linton died contented, kissing his daughter's cheek, ignorant of the misery in store for her.

The next day Heathcliff came over to the Grange to recapture his prey, but now Catharine did not mind; her father dead, she received all the affronts and stings of fate with an enduring apathy; it was only her that they injured. A few days after Linton died in the night, alone with his bride. After a year's absolute misery and loneliness, Catharine's lot was a little lightened by Mr. Heathcliff's preferring Ellen Dean to the vacant post of housekeeper at Wuthering Heights.

For the all-absorbing presence of Catharine Earnshaw had nearly secluded Heathcliff from enmity with the world; he was seldom violent now. He became yet more and more disinclined to society, sitting alone, seldom eating, often walking about the whole night.

His face changed, and the look of brooding hate gave way to a yet more alarming expression—an excited, wild, unnatural appearance of joy. He complained of no illness, yet he was very pale, bloodless, "and his teeth visible now and then in a kind of smile; his frame shivering, not as one shivers with chill or weakness, but as a tight-stretched cord vibrates—a strong thrilling, rather than trembling." At last his mysterious absorption, the stress of his expectation, became so intense that he could not eat. Animated with hunger, he would sit down to his meal, then suddenly start, as if he saw something, glance at the door or the window and go out. Weary and pale, he could not sleep; but left his bed hurriedly, and went out to pace the garden till break of day. "'It is not my fault,' he replied, 'that I cannot eat or rest. I assure you it is through no settled design. I'll do both as soon as I possibly can. But you might as well bid a man struggling in the water rest within arm's-length of the shore. I must reach it first and then I'll rest. As to repenting of my injustices, I've done no injustice and I repent of nothing. I'm too happy, and yet I'm not happy enough. My soul's bliss kills my body, but does not satisfy itself.'"

Meanwhile the schemes of a life, the deeply-laid purposes of his revenge, were toppling unheeded all round him, like a house of cards. His son was dead. Hareton Earnshaw, the real heir of Wuthering Heights, and Catharine, the real heir of Thrushcross Grange, had fallen in love with each other. A most unguessed-at and unlikely finale; yet most natural. For Catharine was spoiled, accomplished, beautiful, proud—yet most affectionate and tender-hearted: and Hareton rude, surly, ignorant, fierce; yet true as steel, staunch, and with a very loving faithful heart, constant even to the man who

had, of set purpose, brutalised him and kept him in servitude. "'Hareton is damnably fond of me!' laughed Heathcliff. 'You'll own that I've out-matched Hindley there. If the dead villain could rise from the grave to abuse me for his offspring's wrongs, I should have the fun of seeing the said offspring fight him back again, indignant that he should dare to rail at the one friend he has in the world.'

"'He'll never be able to emerge from his bathos of coarseness and ignorance,'" cried Heathcliff in exultation; but love can do as much as hatred. Heathcliff, himself as great a boor at twenty, contrived to rub off his clownishness in order to revenge himself upon his enemies; Catharine Linton's love inspired Hareton to as great an effort. This odd, rough love-story, as harshly-sweet as wortle-berries, as dry and stiff in its beauty as purple heather-sprays, is the most purely human, the only tender interest of Wuthering Heights. It is the necessary and lawful anti-climax to Heathcliff's triumph, the final reassertion of the pre-eminence of right. "Conquered good, and conquering ill" is often pitiably true; but not an everlasting law, only a too frequent accident. Perceiving this, Emily Brontë shows the final discomfiture of Heathcliff, who, kinless and kithless, was in the end compelled to see the property he has so cruelly amassed descend to his hereditary enemies. And he was baffled, not so much by Cathy's and Hareton's love affairs as by this sudden reaction from violence, this slackening of the heartstrings, which left him nerveless and anæmic, a prey to encroaching monomania. He had spent his life in crushing the berries for his revenge, in mixing that dark and maddening draught; and when the final moment came, when he lifted it to his lips, desire had left him, he had no taste for it.

"I've done no injustices," said Heathcliff; and though his life had been animated by hate, revenge and passion, let us reflect who have been his victims. Not the old Squire who first sheltered him; for the old man never lived to know his favourite's baseness, and only derived comfort from his presence. Catharine Earnshaw suffered, not from the character of her lover, but because she married a man she merely liked, with her eyes open to the fact that she was thereby wronging the man she loved. "You deserve this," said Heathcliff, when she was dying. "You have killed yourself. Because misery and degradation and death, and nothing that God or Satan could inflict would ever have parted us: *you*, of your own will, did it." Not the morality of Mayfair, but one whose lessons, stern and grim enough, must ever be sorrowfully patent to such erring and passionate spirits. The third of Heathcliff's victims then, or rather the first, was Hindley Earnshaw. But if Hindley had not already been a gamester and a drunkard, a violent and soulless man, Heathcliff could have gained no power over him. Hindley welcomed Heathcliff, as Faustus the Devil, because he could gratify his evil desires; because, in his presence, there was no need to remember shame, nor high purposes, nor forsaken goodness; and when the end comes, and he shall forfeit his soul, let him remember that there were two at that bargain.

Isabella Linton was the most pitiable sufferer. Victim we can scarcely call her, who required no deception, but courted her doom. And after all, a marriage chiefly desired in order to humiliate a sister-in-law and show the bride to be a person of importance, was not intolerably requited by three months of wretched misery; after so much she is suffered to escape. From Edgar Linton, as we have seen, Heathcliff's blows fell aside unharming,

as the executioner's strokes from a legendary martyr. He never learnt how secondary a place he held in his wife's heart, he never knew the misery of his only daughter—misery soon to be turned into joy. He lived and died, patient, happy, trustful, unvisited by the violence and fury that had their centre so near his hearth.

The younger Catharine and Hareton suffered but a temporary ill; the misery they endured together taught them to love; the tyrant's rod had blossomed into roses. And he, lonely and palsied at heart, eating out his soul in bitter solitude, he saw his plans of vengeance all frustrated, so much elaboration so simply counteracted; it was he that suffered.

He suffered now: and Catharine Earnshaw who helped him to ruin by her desertion, and Hindley who perverted him by early oppression, they suffered at his hands. But not the sinless, the constant, the noble; misery, in the end, shifts its dull mists before the light of such clear spirits: *τὰ δράσαντι πάθειν.*

"'It is a poor conclusion, is it not?' said Heathcliff, 'an absurd termination to my violent exertions. I get levers and mattocks to demolish the two houses, and train myself to be capable of working like Hercules, and when everything is ready and in my power, I find the will to lift a slate off either roof has vanished.'

* * * * * *

"Five minutes ago Hareton seemed to be a personification of my youth, not a human being: I felt to him in such a variety of ways that it would have been impossible to have accosted him rationally. In the first place, his startling likeness to Catharine connected him fearfully with her. That, however, which you may suppose the most potent to arrest my imagination is in reality the

least: for what is not connected with her to me? and what does not recall her? I cannot look down to the floor but her features are shaped in the flags! In every cloud, in every tree—filling the air by night and caught by glimpses in every object by day—I am surrounded by her image. The most ordinary faces of men and women—my own features—mock me with a resemblance. The entire world is a dreadful collection of memoranda that she did exist, and that I have lost her! Well, Hareton's aspect was the ghost of my immortal love; of my wild endeavours to hold my right; my degradation, my pride, my happiness, and my anguish——

"But it is frenzy to repeat these thoughts to you: only it will let you know why, with a reluctance to be always alone, his society is no benefit; rather an aggravation of the constant torment I suffer; and it partly contributes to render me regardless how he and his cousin go on together. I can give them no attention any more."

Sweet, forward Catharine and coy, passionate Hareton got on very prettily together. I can recall no more touching and lifelike scene than that first love-making of theirs, one rainy afternoon, in the kitchen where Nelly Dean is ironing the linen. Hareton, sulky and miserable, sitting by the fire, hurt by a gunshot wound, but yet more by the manifold rebuffs of pretty Cathy. She, with all her sauciness, limp in the dull, wet weather, coaxing him into good temper with the sweetest advancing graces. It is strange that in speaking of 'Wuthering Heights' this beautiful episode should be so universally forgotten, and only the violence and passion of more terrible passages associated with Emily Brontë's name. Yet, out of the strong cometh forth the sweet; and the best honey from the dry heather-bells.

Meanwhile, Heathcliff let them go on, frightening them more by his strange mood of abstraction than by his accustomed ferocity.

He could give them no attention any more. For four days he could neither eat nor rest, till his cheeks grew hollow and his eyes bloodshot, like a person starving with hunger, and growing blind with loss of sleep.

At last one early morning, when the rain was streaming in at Heathcliff's flapping lattice, Nelly Dean, like a good housewife, went in to shut it to. The master must be up or out, she said. But pushing back the panels of the inclosed bed, she found him there, laid on his back, his open eyes keen and fierce; quite still, though his face and throat were washed with rain; quite still, with a frightful, lifelike gaze of exultation under his brows, with parted lips and sharp white teeth that sneered—quite still and harmless now; dead and stark.

Dead, before any vengeance had overtaken him other than the slow, retributive sufferings of his own breast; dead, slain by too much hope, and an unnatural joy. Never before had any villain so strange an end; never before had any sufferer so protracted and sinister a torment, "beguiled with the spectre of a hope through eighteen years."

No more public nor authoritative punishment. Hareton passionately mourned his lost tyrant, weeping in bitter earnest, and kissing the sarcastic, savage face that every one else shrunk from contemplating. And Heathcliff's memory was sacred, having in the youth he ruined a most valiant defender. Even Catharine might never bemoan his wickednesses to her husband.

No execrations in this world or the next; a great quiet envelops him. His violence was not strong enough to reach that final peace and mar its completeness. His

grave is next to Catharine's, and near to Edgar Linton's; over them all the wild bilberry springs, and the peat-moss and heather. They do not reck of the passion, the capricious sweetness, the steady goodness that lie underneath. It is all one to them and to the larks singing aloft.

"I lingered round the graves under that benign sky; watched the moths fluttering among the heath and harebells, listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass; and wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth."

So ends the story of Wuthering Heights.

The world is now agreed to accept that story as a great and tragic study of passion and sorrow, a wild picture of storm and moorland, of outraged goodness and ingratitude. The world which has crowned 'King Lear' with immortality, keeps a lesser wreath for 'Wuthering Heights.' But in 1848, the peals of triumph which acclaimed the success of 'Jane Eyre' had no echo for the work of Ellis Bell. That strange genius, brooding and foreboding, intense and narrow, was passed over, disregarded. One author, indeed, in one review, Sydney Dobell, in the *Palladium* spoke nobly and clearly of the energy and genius of this book; but when that clarion augury of fame at last was sounded, Emily did not hear. Two years before they had laid her in the tomb.

No praise for Ellis Bell. It is strange to think that of Charlotte's two sisters it was Anne who had the one short draught of exhilarating fame. When the 'Tenant of Wildfell Hall' was in proof, Ellis's and Acton's publisher sold it to an American firm as the last and finest production of the author of 'Jane Eyre' and 'Wuthering Heights.' Strange, that even a publisher could so

blunder, even for his own interest. However, this mistake caused sufficient confusion at Cornhill to make it necessary that the famous Charlotte, accompanied by Anne, in her quality of secondary and mistakable genius, should go to town and explain their separate existence. No need to disturb the author of 'Wuthering Heights,' that crude work of a 'prentice hand, over whose reproduction no publishers quarrelled; such troublesome honours were not for her.

"Yet," says Charlotte, "I must not be understood to make these things subject for reproach or complaint; I dare not do so; respect for my sister's memory forbids me. By her any such querulous manifestation would have been regarded as an unworthy and offensive weakness."

When, indeed, did the murmur of complaint pass those pale, inspired lips? Failure can have come to her with no shock of aghast surprise. All her plans had failed; Branwell's success, the school, her poems: her strong will, had not carried them on to success.

But though it could not bring success, it could support her against despair. When this last, dearest, strongest work of hers was weighed in the world's scales and found wanting, she did not sigh, resign herself, and think the battle over; she would have fought again.

But the battle was over, over before victory was declared. No more failures, no more strivings for that brave spirit. It was in July that Charlotte and Anne returned from London, in July when the heather is in bud; scarce one last withered spray was left in December to place on Emily's deathbed.

CHAPTER XVI.

'SHIRLEY.'

WHILE 'Wuthering Heights' was still in the reviewer's hands, Emily Brontë's more fortunate sister was busy on another novel. This book has never attained the steady success of her masterpiece, 'Villette,' neither did it meet with the *furor* which greeted the first appearance of 'Jane Eyre.' It is, indeed, inferior to either work; a very quiet study of Yorkshire life, almost pettifogging in its interest in ecclesiastical squabbles, almost absurd in the feminine inadequacy of its heroes. And yet 'Shirley' has a grace and beauty of its own. This it derives from the charm of its heroines—Caroline Helstone, a lovely portrait in character of Charlotte's dearest friend, and Shirley herself, a fancy likeness of Emily Brontë.

Emily Brontë, but under very different conditions. No longer poor, no longer thwarted, no longer acquainted with misery and menaced by untimely death; not thus, but as a loving sister would fain have seen her, beautiful, triumphant, the spoiled child of happy fortune. Yet in these altered circumstances Shirley keeps her likeness to Charlotte's hardworking sister; the disguise, haply baffling those who, like Mrs. Gaskell, "have not a pleasant impression of Emily Brontë," is very easily penetrated by those who love her. Under the pathetic finery so lovingly bestowed, under the borrowed splen-

dours of a thousand a year, a lovely face, an ancestral manor-house, we recognise our hardy and headstrong heroine, and smile a little sadly at the inefficiency of this masquerade of grandeur, so indifferent and unnecessary to her. We recognise Charlotte's sister; but not the author of 'Wuthering Heights.' Through these years we discern the brilliant heiress to be a person of infinitely inferior importance to the ill-dressed and overworked Vicar's daughter. Imperial Shirley, no need to wave your majestic wand, we have bowed to it long ago unblinded; and all its illusive splendours are not so potent as that worn-down goose-quill which you used to wield in the busy kitchen of your father's parsonage.

Yet without that admirable portrait we should have scant warrant for our conception of Emily Brontë's character. Her work is singularly impersonal. You gather from it that she loved the moors, that from her youth up the burden of a tragic fancy had lain hard upon her; that she had seen the face of sorrow close, meeting that Medusa-glance with rigid and defiant fortitude. So much we learn; but this is very little—a one-sided truth and therefore scarcely a truth at all.

Charlotte's portrait gives us another view, and fortunately there are still a few alive of the not numerous friends of Emily Brontë. Every trait, every reminiscence paints in darker, clearer lines, the impression of character which 'Shirley' leaves upon us. Shirley is indeed the exterior Emily, the Emily that was to be met and known thirty-five years ago, only a little polished, with the angles a little smoothed, by a sister's anxious care. The nobler Emily, deeply-suffering, brooding, pitying, creating, is only to be found in a stray word here and there, a chance memory, a happy answer, gathered from the pages of her work, and the loving remembrance of her

friends; but these remnants are so direct, unusual, personal, and characteristic, this outline is of so decided a type, that it affects us more distinctly than many stippled and varnished portraits do.

But to know how Emily Brontë looked, moved, sat and spoke, we still return to 'Shirley.' A host of corroborating memories start up in turning the pages. Who but Emily was always accompanied by a "rather large, strong, and fierce-looking dog, very ugly, being of a breed between a mastiff and a bulldog?" it is familiar to us as Una's lion; we do not need to be told, Currer Bell, that she always sat on the hearthrug of nights, with her hand on his head, reading a book; we remember well how necessary it was to secure him as an ally in winning her affection. Has not a dear friend informed us that she first obtained Emily's heart by meeting, without apparent fear or shrinking, Keeper's huge springs of demonstrative welcome?

Certainly "Captain Keeldar," with her cavalier airs, her ready disdain, her love of independence, does bring back with vivid brilliance the memory of our old acquaintance, "the Major." We recognise that pallid slimness, masking an elastic strength which seems impenetrable to fatigue—and we sigh, recalling a passage in Anne's letters, recording how, when rheumatism, coughs, and influenza made an hospital of Haworth Vicarage during the visitations of the dread east wind, Emily alone looked on and wondered why anyone should be ill—"she considers it a very uninteresting wind; it does not affect her nervous system." We know her, too, by her kindness to her inferiors. A hundred little stories throng our minds. Unforgotten delicacies made with her own hands for her servant's friend, yet-remembered visits of Martha's little cousin to the kitchen,

where Miss Emily would bring in her own chair for the ailing girl; anecdotes of her early rising through many years to do the hardest work, because the first servant was too old, and the second too young to get up so soon; and she, Emily, was so strong. A hundred little sacrifices, dearer to remembrance than Shirley's open purse, awaken in our hearts and remind us that, after all, Emily was the nobler and more lovable heroine of the twain.

How characteristic, too, the touch that makes her scornful of all that is dominant, dogmatic, avowedly masculine in the men of her acquaintance; and gentleness itself to the poetic Philip Nunnely, the gay, boyish Mr. Sweeting, the sentimental Louis, the lame, devoted boy-cousin who loves her in pathetic canine fashion. That courage, too, was hers. Not only Shirley's flesh, but Emily's, felt the tearing fangs of the mad dog to whom she had charitably offered food and water; not only Shirley's flesh, but hers, shrank from the light scarlet, glowing tip of the Italian iron with which she straightway cauterised the wound, going quickly into the laundry and operating on herself without a word to any one.

Emily, also, singlehanded and unarmed, punished her great bulldog for his household misdemeanours, in defiance of an express warning not to strike the brute, lest his uncertain temper should rouse him to fly at the striker's throat. And it was she who fomented his bruises. This prowess and tenderness of Shirley's is an old story to us.

And Shirley's love of picturesque and splendid raiment is not without an echo in our memories. It was Emily who, shopping in Bradford with Charlotte and her friend, chose a white stuff patterned with lilac thunder and light-

ning, to the scarcely concealed horror of her more sober companions. And she looked well in it; a tall, lithe creature, with a grace half-queenly, half-untamed in her sudden, supple movements, wearing with picturesque negligence her ample purple-splashed skirts; her face clear and pale; her very dark and plenteous brown hair fastened up behind with a Spanish comb; her large grey-hazel eyes, now full of indolent, indulgent humour, now glimmering with hidden meanings, now quickened into flame by a flash of indignation, "a red ray piercing the dew."

She, too, had Shirley's taste for the management of business. We remember Charlotte's disquiet when Emily insisted on investing Miss Branwell's legacies in York and Midland Railway shares. "She managed, in a most handsome and able manner for me when I was in Brussels, and prevented by distance from looking after our interests, therefore I will let her manage still and take the consequences. Disinterested and energetic she certainly is; and, if she be not quite so tractable or open to conviction as I could wish, I must remember perfection is not the lot of humanity, and, as long as we can regard those whom we love, and to whom we are closely allied, with profound and never-shaken esteem, it is a small thing that they should vex us occasionally by what appear to us headstrong and unreasonable notions." *

So speaks the kind elder sister, the author of 'Shirley.' But there are some who will never love either type or portrait. Sydney Dobell spoke a bitter half-truth when, ignorant of Shirley's real identity, he declared: "We have only to imagine Shirley Keeldar poor to imagine her repulsive." The silenced pride, the thwarted generosity, the unspoken power, the contained passion of

* Mrs. Gaskell.

such a nature are not qualities which touch the world when it finds them in an obscure and homely woman. Even now, very many will not love a heroine so independent of their esteem. They will resent the frank imperiousness, caring not to please, the unyielding strength, the absence of trivial submissive tendernesses, for which she makes amends by such large humane and generous compassion. "In Emily's nature," says her sister, "the extremes of vigour and simplicity seemed to meet. Under an unsophisticated culture, inartificial taste and an unpretending outside, lay a power and fire that might have informed the brain and kindled the veins of a hero; but she had no worldly wisdom—her powers were unadapted to the practical business of life—she would fail to defend her most manifest rights, to consult her legitimate advantage. An interpreter ought always to have stood between her and the world. Her will was not very flexible and it generally opposed her interest. Her temper was magnanimous, but warm and sudden; her spirit altogether unbending." *

So speaks Emily's inspired interpreter, whose genius has not made her sister popular. 'Shirley' is not a favourite with a modern public. Emily Brontë was born out of date. Athene, leading the nymphs in their headlong chase down the rocky spurs of Olympus, and stopping in full career to lift in her arms the weanlings, tender as dew, or the chance-hurt cubs of the mountain, might have chosen her as her hunt-fellow. Or Brunhilda, the strong Valkyr, dreading the love of man, whose delight is battle and the wild summits of hills, forfeiting her immortality to shield the helpless and the weak; she would have recognised the kinship of this last-born sister. But we moderns care not for these.

* 'Biographical Notice.' C. Brontë.

Our heroines are Juliet, Desdemona and Imogen, our examples Dorothea Brooke and Laura Pendennis, women whose charm is a certain fragrance of affection. 'Shirley' is too independent for our taste; and, for the rest, we are all in love with Caroline Helstone.

Disinterested, headstrong, noble Emily Brontë, at this time, while your magical sister was weaving for you, with golden words, a web of fate as fortunate as dreams, the true Norns were spinning a paler shrouding garment. You were never to see the brightest things in life. Sisterly love, free solitude, unpraised creation, were to remain your most poignant joys. No touch of love, no hint of fame, no hours of ease, lie for you across the knees of Fate. Neither rose nor laurel will be shed on your coffined form. Meanwhile, your sister writes and dreams for Shirley. Terrible difference between ideas and truth; wonderful magic of the unreal to take their sting from the veritable wounds we endure!

Neither rose nor laurel will we lay reverently for remembrance over the tomb where you sleep; but the flower that was always your own, the wild, dry heather. You, who were, in your sister's phrase, "moorish, wild and knotty as a root of heath," you grew to your own perfection on the waste where no laurel rustles its polished leaves, where no sweet, fragile rose ever opened in the heart of June. The storm and the winter darkness, the virgin earth, the blasting winds of March, would have slain them utterly; but all these served to make the heather light and strong, to flush its bells with a ruddier purple, to fill its cells with honey more pungently sweet. The cold wind and wild earth make the heather; it would not grow in the sheltered meadows. And you, had you known the fate that love would have chosen, you too would not have thrived in your full bloom.

Another happy, prosperous north-country matron would be dead. But now you live, still singing of freedom, the undying soul of courage and loneliness, another voice in the wind, another glory on the mountain-tops, Emily Brontë, the author of 'Wuthering Heights.'

CHAPTER XVII.

BRANWELL'S END.

THE autumn of the year 1848 was tempestuous and wild, with sudden and frequent changes of temperature, and cold penetrating wind. Those chilling blasts whirling round the small grey parsonage on its exposed hill-top, brought sickness in their train. Anne and Charlotte drooped and languished; Branwell, too, was ill. His constitution seemed shattered by excesses which he had not the resolution to forego. Often he would sleep most of the day; or at least sit dosing hour after hour in a lethargy of weakness; but with the night this apathy would change to violence and suffering. "Papa, and sometimes all of us have sad nights with him," writes Charlotte in the last days of July.

Yet, so well the little household knew the causes of this reverse, no immediate danger was suspected. He was weak, certainly, and his appetite failed; but opium-eaters are not strong nor hungry. Neither Branwell himself, nor his relations, nor any physician consulted in his case thought it one of immediate danger; it seemed as if this dreary life might go on for ever, marking its hours by a perpetual swing and rebound of excess and suffering.

During this melancholy autumn Mr. Grundy was staying at Skipton, a town about seventeen miles from

Haworth. Mindful of his old friend, he invited Branwell to be his guest; but the dying youth was too weak to make even that little journey, although he longed for the excitement of change. Mr. Grundy was so much moved by the miserable tone of Branwell's letter that he drove over to Haworth to see for himself what ailed his old companion. He was very shocked at the change. Pale, sunk, tremulous, utterly wrecked; there was no hope for Branwell now; he had again taken to eating opium.

Anything for excitement, for a variation to his incessant sorrow. Weak as he was, and scarcely able to leave his bed, he craved piteously for an appointment of any kind, any reason for leaving Haworth, for getting quit of his old thoughts, any post anywhere for Heaven's sake so it were out of their whispering. He had not long to wait.

Later in that cold and bleak September Mr. Grundy again visited Haworth. He sent to the Vicarage for Branwell, and ordered dinner and a fire to welcome him; the room looked cosy and warm. While Mr. Grundy sat waiting for his guest, the Vicar was shown in. He, too, was strangely altered; much of his old stiffness of manner gone; and it was with genuine affection that he spoke of Branwell, and almost with despair that he touched on his increasing miseries. When Mr. Grundy's message had come, the poor, self-distraught sufferer had been lying ill in bed, apparently too weak to move; but the feverish restlessness which marked his latter years was too strong to resist the chance of excitement. He had insisted upon coming, so his father said, and would immediately be ready. Then the sorrowful half-blind old gentleman made his adieus to his son's host, and left the inn.

"Presently the door opened cautiously, and a head appeared. It was a mass of red, unkempt, uncut hair, wildly floating round a great, gaunt forehead; the cheeks yellow and hollow, the mouth fallen, the thin white lips not trembling but shaking, the sunken eyes, once small, now glaring with the light of madness—all told the sad tale but too surely. I hastened to my friend, greeted him in my gayest manner, as I knew he best liked, drew him quickly into the room, and forced upon him a stiff glass of hot brandy. Under its influence and that of the bright, cheerful surroundings, he looked frightened—frightened of himself. He glanced at me a moment, and muttered something of leaving a warm bed to come out in the cold night. Another glass of brandy, and returning warmth gradually brought him back to something like the Brontë of old. He even ate some dinner, a thing which he said he had not done for long; so our last interview was pleasant though grave. I never knew his intellect clearer. He described himself as waiting anxiously for death—indeed, longing for it, and happy, in these his sane moments, to think it was so near. He once again declared that that death would be due to the story I knew, and to nothing else.

"When at last I was compelled to leave, he quietly drew from his coat-sleeve a carving-knife, placed it on the table, and, holding me by both hands, said that, having given up all hopes of ever seeing me again, he imagined when my message came that it was a call from Satan. Dressing himself, he took the knife which he had long secreted, and came to the inn, with a full determination to rush into the room and stab the occupant. In the excited state of his mind, he did not recognise me when he opened the door, but my voice and manner conquered him, and 'brought him home to himself,' as

he expressed it. I left him standing bare-headed in the road with bowed form and dropping tears." *

He went home, and a few days afterwards he died. That little intervening time was happier and calmer than any he had known for years; his evil habits, his hardened feelings slipped, like a mask, from the soul already touched by the final quiet. He was singularly altered and softened, gentle and loving to the father and sisters who had borne so much at his hands. It was as though he had awakened from the fierce delirium of a fever; weak though he was and shattered, they could again recognise in him their Branwell of old times, the hope and promise of all their early dreams. Neither they nor he dreamed that the end was so near; he had often talked of death, but now that he stood in the shadow of its wings, he was unconscious of that subduing presence. And it is pleasant to think that the sweet demeanour of his last days was not owing to the mere cowardly fear of death; but rather a return of the soul to its true self, a natural dropping-off of all extraneous fever and error, before the suffering of its life should close. Half an hour before he died Branwell was unconscious of danger; he was out in the village two days before, and was only confined to bed one single day. The next morning was a Sunday, the twenty-fourth of September. Branwell awoke to it perfectly conscious, and through the holy quiet of that early morning he lay, troubled by neither fear nor suffering, while the bells of the neighbouring church, the neighbouring tower whose fabulous antiquity had furnished him with many a boyish pleasantry, called the villagers to worship They all knew him, all as they passed the house would look up and wonder if "t' Vicar's Patrick" were better or worse. But those of the

* 'Pictures of the Past.'

Parsonage were not at church: they watched in Branwell's hushed and peaceful chamber.

Suddenly a terrible change came over the quiet face; there was no mistaking the sudden, heart-shaking summons. And now Charlotte sank; always nervous and highly strung, the mere dread of what might be to come, laid her prostrate. They led her away, and for a week she kept her bed in sickness and fever. But Branwell, the summoned, the actual sufferer, met death with a different face. He insisted upon getting up; if he had succumbed to the horrors of life he would defy the horrors of extinction; he would die as he thought no one had ever died before, standing. So, like some ancient Celtic hero, when the last agony began, he rose to his feet; hushed and awe-stricken, the old father, praying Anne, loving Emily, looked on. He rose to his feet and died erect after twenty minutes' struggle.

They found his pockets filled with the letters of the woman he had so passionately loved.

He was dead, this Branwell who had wrung the hearts of his household day by day, who drank their tears as wine. He was dead, and now they mourned him with acute and bitter pain. "All his vices were and are nothing now; we remember only his woes," writes Charlotte. They buried him in the same vault that had been opened twenty-three years ago to receive the childish, wasted corpses of Elizabeth and Maria. Sunday came round, recalling minute by minute the ebbing of his life, and Emily Brontë, pallid and dressed in black, can scarcely have heard her brother's funeral sermon for looking at the stone which hid so many memories, such useless compassion. She took her brother's death very much to heart, growing thin and pale and saying nothing. She had made an effort to go to church that Sunday, and

as she sat there, quiet and hollow-eyed, perhaps she felt it was well that she had looked upon his resting-place, upon the grave where so much of her heart was buried. For, after his funeral, she never rallied; a cold and cough, taken then, gained fearful hold upon her, and she never went out of doors after that memorable Sunday.

But looking on her quiet, uncomplaining eyes, you would not have guessed so much.

"Emily and Anne are pretty well," says Charlotte, on the ninth of October, "though Anne is always delicate and Emily has a cold and cough at present."

CHAPTER XVIII.

EMILY'S DEATH.

ALREADY by the 29th of October of this melancholy year of 1848 Emily's cough and cold had made such progress as to alarm her careful elder sister. Before Branwell's death she had been, to all appearance, the one strong member of a delicate family. By the side of fragile Anne (already, did they but know it, advanced in tubercular consumption), of shattered Branwell, of Charlotte, ever nervous and ailing, this tall, muscular Emily had appeared a tower of strength. Working early and late, seldom tired and never complaining, finding her best relaxation in long, rough walks on the moors, she seemed unlikely to give them any poignant anxiety. But the seeds of phthisis lay deep down beneath this fair show of life and strength; the shock of sorrow which she experienced for her brother's death developed them with alarming rapidity.

The weariness of absence had always proved too much for Emily's strength. Away from home we have seen how she pined and sickened. Exile made her thin and wan, menaced the very springs of life. And now she must endure an inevitable and unending absence, an exile from which there could be no return. The strain was too tight, the wrench too sharp: Emily could not bear it and live. In such a loss as hers, bereaved of a helpless sufferer, the mourning of those who remain is

embittered and quickened a hundred times a day when the blank minutes come round for which the customary duties are missing, when the unwelcome leisure hangs round the weary soul like a shapeless and encumbering garment. It was Emily who had chiefly devoted herself to Branwell. He being dead, the motive of her life seemed gone.

Had she been stronger, had she been more careful of herself at the beginning of her illness, she would doubtless have recovered, and we shall never know the difference in our literature which a little precaution might have made. But Emily was accustomed to consider herself hardy; she was so used to wait upon others that to lie down and be waited on would have appeared to her ignominious and absurd. Both her independence and her unselfishness made her very chary of giving trouble. It is, moreover, extremely probable that she never realised the extent of her own illness; consumption is seldom a malady that despairs; attacking the body it leaves the spirit free, the spirit which cannot realise a danger by which it is not injured. A little later on when it was Anne's turn to suffer, she is choosing her spring bonnet four days before her death. Which of us does not remember some such pathetic tale of the heart-wringing, vain confidence of those far gone in phthisis, who bear on their faces the marks of death for all eyes but their own to read?

To those who look on, there is no worse agony than to watch the brave bearing of these others unconscious of the sudden grave at their feet. Charlotte and Anne looked on and trembled. On the 29th of October, Charlotte, still delicate from the bilious fever which had prostrated her on the day of Branwell's death, writes these words already full of foreboding:

"I feel much more uneasy about my sister than myself just now. Emily's cold and cough are very obstinate. I fear she has pain in her chest, and I sometimes catch a shortness in her breathing when she has moved at all quickly. She looks very thin and pale. Her reserved nature occasions me great uneasiness of mind. It is useless to question her; you get no answer. It is still more useless to recommend remedies; they are never adopted."*

It was, in fact, an acute inflammation of the lungs which this unfortunate sufferer was trying to subdue by force of courage. To persons of strong will it is difficult to realise that their disease is not in their own control. To be ill, is with them an act of acquiescence; they have consented to the demands of their feeble body. When necessity demands the sacrifice, it seems to them so easy to deny themselves the rest, the indulgence. They set their will against their weakness and mean to conquer. They will not give up.

Emily would not give up. She felt herself doubly necessary to the household in this hour of trial. Charlotte was still very weak and ailing. Anne, her dear little sister, was unusually delicate and frail. Even her father had not quite escaped. That she, Emily, who had always been relied upon for strength and courage and endurance, should show herself unworthy of the trust when she was most sorely needed; that she, so inclined to take all duties on herself, so necessary to the daily management of the house, should throw up her charge in this moment of trial, cast away her arms in the moment of battle, and give her fellow-sufferers the extra burden of her weakness; such a thing was impossible to her.

* Mrs. Gaskell.

So the vain struggle went on. She would resign no one of her duties, and it was not till within the last weeks of her life that she would so much as suffer the servant to rise before her in the morning and take the early work. She would not endure to hear of remedies; declaring that she was not ill, that she would soon be well, in the pathetic self-delusion of high-spirited weakness. And Charlotte and Anne, for whose sake she made this sacrifice, suffered terribly thereby. Willingly, thankfully would they have taken all her duties upon them; they burned to be up and doing. But—seeing how weak she was—they dare not cross her; they had to sit still and endure to see her labour for their comfort with faltering and death-cold hands.

"Day by day," says Charlotte, "day by day when I saw with what a front she met suffering, I looked on her with a wonder of anguish and love. I have seen nothing like it; but, indeed, I have never seen her parallel in anything. Stronger than a man, simpler than a child, her nature stood alone. The awful point was that, while full of ruth for others, on herself she had no pity; the spirit was inexorable to the flesh; from the trembling hand, the unnerved limbs, the fading eyes, the same service was exacted as they had rendered in health. To stand by and witness this, and not dare to remonstrate, was a pain no words can render."

The time went on. Anxious to try what influence some friend, not of their own household, might exert upon this wayward sister, Charlotte thought of inviting Miss Nussey to Haworth. Emily had ever been glad to welcome her. But when the time came it was found that the least disturbance of the day's routine would only make Emily's burden heavier. And that scheme, too, was relinquished.

Another month had gone. Emily, paler and thinner, but none less resolute, fulfilled her duties with customary exactness, and insisted on her perfect health with defiant fortitude. On the 23rd of November, Charlotte writes again :—

"I told you Emily was ill in my last letter. She has not rallied yet. She is *very* ill. I believe if you were to see her your impression would be that there is no hope. A more hollow, wasted, pallid aspect I have not beheld. The deep, tight cough continues ; the breathing after the least exertion is a rapid pant ; and these symptoms are accompanied by pains in the chest and side. Her pulse, the only time she allowed it to be felt, was found to beat 115 per minute. In this state she resolutely refuses to see a doctor ; she will give no explanation of her feelings ; she will scarcely allow her feelings to be alluded to."

"No poisoning doctor" should come near her, Emily declared with the irritability of her disease. It was an insult to her will, her resolute endeavours. She was not, would not, be ill, and could therefore need no cure. Perhaps she felt, deep in her heart, the conviction that her complaint was mortal ; that a delay in the sentence was all that care and skill could give ; for she had seen Maria and Elizabeth fade and die, and only lately the physicians had not saved her brother.

But Charlotte, naturally, did not feel the same. Unknown to Emily, she wrote to a great London doctor drawing up a statement of the case and symptoms as minute and careful as she could give. But either this diagnosis by guesswork was too imperfect, or the physician saw that there was no hope ; for his opinion was expressed too obscurely to be of any use. He sent a bottle of medicine, but Emily would not take it.

December came, and still the wondering, anxious sisters knew not what to think. By this time Mr. Brontë also had perceived the danger of Emily's state, and he was very anxious. Yet she still denied that she was ill with anything more grave than a passing weakness; and the pain in her side and chest appeared to diminish. Sometimes the little household was tempted to take her at her word, and believe that soon, with the spring, she would recover; and then, hearing her cough, listening to the gasping breath with which she climbed the short staircase, looking on the extreme emaciation of her form, the wasted hands, the hollow eyes, their hearts would suddenly fail. Life was a daily contradiction of hope and fear.

The days drew on towards Christmas; it was already the middle of December, and still Emily was about the house, able to wait upon herself, to sew for the others, to take an active share in the duties of the day. She always fed the dogs herself. One Monday evening, it must have been about the 14th of December, she rose as usual to give the creatures their supper. She got up, walking slowly, holding out in her thin hands an apronful of broken meat and bread. But when she reached the flagged passage the cold took her; she staggered on the uneven pavement and fell against the wall. Her sisters, who had been sadly following her, unseen, came forwards much alarmed and begged her to desist; but, smiling wanly, she went on and gave Floss and Keeper their last supper from her hands.

The next morning she was worse. Before her waking, her watching sisters heard the low, unconscious moaning that tells of suffering continued even in sleep; and they feared for what the coming year might hold in store. Of the nearness of the end they did not dream. Char-

lotte had been out over the moors, searching every glen and hollow for a sprig of heather, however pale and dry, to take to her moor-loving sister. But Emily looked on the flower laid on her pillow with indifferent eyes. She was already estranged and alienate from life.

Nevertheless she persisted in rising, dressing herself alone, and doing everything for herself. A fire had been lit in the room, and Emily sat on the hearth to comb her hair. She was thinner than ever now—the tall, loose-jointed "slinky" girl—her hair in its plenteous dark abundance was all of her that was not marked by the branding finger of death. She sat on the hearth combing her long brown hair. But soon the comb slipped from her feeble grasp into the cinders. She, the intrepid, active Emily, watched it burn and smoulder, too weak to lift it, while the nauseous, hateful odour of burnt bone rose into her face. At last the servant came in: "Martha," she said, "my comb's down there; I was too weak to stoop and pick it up."

I have seen that old, broken comb, with a large piece burned out of it; and have thought it, I own, more pathetic than the bones of the eleven thousand virgins at Cologne, or the time-blackened Holy Face of Lucca. Sad, chance confession of human weakness; mournful counterpart of that chainless soul which to the end maintained its fortitude and rebellion. The flesh is weak. Since I saw that relic, the strenuous verse of Emily Brontë's last poem has seemed to me far more heroic, far more moving; remembering in what clinging and prisoning garments that free spirit was confined.

The flesh was weak, but Emily would grant it no indulgence. She finished her dressing, and came very slowly, with dizzy head and tottering steps, downstairs into the little bare parlour where Anne was working and

Charlotte writing a letter. Emily took up some work and tried to sew. Her catching breath, her drawn and altered face were ominous of the end. But still a little hope flickered in those sisterly hearts. "She grows daily weaker," wrote Charlotte, on that memorable Tuesday morning; seeing surely no portent that this—this! was to be the last of the days and the hours of her weakness.

The morning drew on to noon, and Emily grew worse. She could no longer speak, but—gasping in a husky whisper—she said: "If you will send for a doctor. I will see him now!" Alas, it was too late. The shortness of breath and rending pain increased; even Emily could no longer conceal them. Towards two o'clock her sisters begged her, in an agony, to let them put her to bed. "No, no," she cried; tormented with the feverish restlessness that comes before the last, most quiet peace. She tried to rise, leaning with one hand upon the sofa. And thus the chord of life snapped. She was dead.

She was twenty-nine years old.

They buried her, a few days after, under the church pavement; under the slab of stone where their mother lay, and Maria and Elizabeth and Branwell.

She who had so mourned her brother had verily found him again, and should sleep well at his side.

φίλη μετ' αὐτοῦ κείσομαι, φίλου μέτα.

And though no wind ever rustles over the grave on which no scented heather springs, nor any bilberry bears its sprigs of greenest leaves and purple fruit, she will not miss them now; she who wondered how any could imagine unquiet slumbers for them that sleep in the quiet earth.

They followed her to her grave—her old father, Charlotte, the dying Anne; and as they left the doors, they

were joined by another mourner, Keeper, Emily's dog. He walked in front of all, first in the rank of mourners; and perhaps no other creature had known the dead woman quite so well. When they had lain her to sleep in the dark, airless vault under the church, and when they had crossed the bleak churchyard, and had entered the empty house again, Keeper went straight to the door of the room where his mistress used to sleep, and lay down across the threshold. There he howled piteously for many days; knowing not that no lamentations could wake her any more. Over the little parlour below a great calm had settled. "Why should we be otherwise than calm," says Charlotte, writing to her friend on the 21st of December. "The anguish of seeing her suffer is over; the spectacle of the pains of death is gone by; the funeral day is past. We feel she is at peace. No need now to tremble for the hard frost and the keen wind. Emily does not feel them."

The death was over, indeed, and the funeral day was past; yet one duty remained to the heart-wrung mourners, not less poignant than the sight of the dead changed face, not less crushing than the thud of stones and clods on the coffin of one beloved. They took the great brown desk in which she used to keep her papers, and sorted and put in order all that they found in it. How appealing the sight of that hurried, casual writing of a hand now stark in death! How precious each of those pages whose like should never be made again till the downfall of the earth in the end of time! How near, how utterly cut-off, the Past!

They found no novel, half-finished or begun, in the old brown desk which she used to rest on her knees, sitting under the thorns. But they discovered a poem, written at the end of Emily's life, profound, sincere, as befits the

last words one has time to speak. It is the most perfect and expressive of her work: the fittest monument to her heroic spirit.

Thus run the last lines she ever traced:

"No coward soul is mine,
No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere;
I see heaven's glories shine,
And faith shines equal, arming me from fear.

"O God, within my breast,
Almighty, ever-present Deity!
Life, that in me has rest,
As I—undying life—have power in Thee.

"Vain are the thousand creeds
That move men's hearts: unutterably vain;
Worthless as withered weeds,
Or idlest froth amid the boundless main,

"To waken doubt in one
Holding so fast by thine infinity;
So surely anchored on
The steadfast rock of immortality.

"With wide-embracing love
Thy spirit animates eternal years,
Pervades and broods above,
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates, and rears.

"Though earth and man were gone,
And suns and universes ceased to be,
And Thou wert left alone,
Every existence would exist in Thee.

"There is not room for Death,
No atom that his might could render void;
Thou—Thou art Being, Breath,
And what Thou art may never be destroyed.[1]

FINIS!

"SHE died in a time of promise."

So writes Charlotte, in the first flush of her grief. "She died in a time of promise;" having done much, indeed, having done enough to bring her powers to ripe perfection. And the fruit of that perfection is denied us. She died, between the finishing of labour and the award of praise. Before the least hint of the immortality that has been awarded her could reach her in her obscure and distant home. Without one success in all her life, with her school never kept, her verses never read, her novel never praised, her brother dead in ruin. All her ambitions had flagged and died of the blight. But she was still young, ready to live, eager to try again.

"She died in a time of promise. We saw her taken from life in its prime."

Truly a prime of sorrow, the dark mid-hour of the storm, dark with the grief gone by and the blackness of the on-coming grief. With Branwell dead, with her dearest sister dying, Emily died. Had she lived, what profit could she have made of her life? For us, indeed, it would have been well; but for her? Fame in solitude is bitter food; and Anne will die in May; and Charlotte six years after; and Emily never could make new friends. Better far for her, that loving, faithful spirit, to die while still her life was dear, while still there was hope in the world, than to linger on a few years longer, in loneliness

and weakness, to quit in fame and misery a disillusioned life.

"She died in a time of promise. We saw her taken from life in its prime. But it is God's will, and the place where she is gone is better than that she has left."

Truly better, to leave her soul to speak in the world for aye, for the wind to be stronger for her breath, and the heather more purple from her heart; better far to be lost in the all-embracing, all-transmuting process of life, than to live in cramped and individual pain. So at least, wrong or right, thought this woman who loved the earth so well. She was not afraid to die. The thought of death filled her with no perplexities; but with assured and happy calm. She held it more glorious than fame, and sweeter than love, to give her soul to God and her body to the earth. And which of us shall carp at the belief which made a very painful life contented?

"The thing that irks me most is this shattered prison, after all. I'm tired of being enclosed here. I'm wearying to escape into that glorious world, and to be always there; not seeing it dimly through tears, and yearning for it through the walls of an aching heart; but really with it and in it. You think you are better and more fortunate than I, in full health and strength; you are sorry for me—very soon that will be altered. I shall be sorry for you. I shall be incomparably above and beyond you all." *

Ah, yes; incomparably above and beyond. Not only because of the keen vision with which she has revealed the glorious world in which her memory is fresher wind, and brighter sunshine, not only for that; but because the remembrance of her living self is a most high and

* 'Wuthering Heights.'

noble precept. Never before were hands so inspired alike for daily drudgery and for golden writing never to fade. Never was any heart more honourable and strong, nor any more pitiful to shameful weakness. Seldom, indeed, has any man, more seldom still any woman, owned the inestimable gift of genius and never once made it an excuse for a weakness, a violence, a failing, which in other mortals we condemn. No deed of hers requires such apology. Therefore, being dead she persuades us to honour; and not only her works but the memory of her life shall rise up and praise her, who lived without praise so well.

THE END.

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